

**New chiefs**

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak met yesterday with Maj. Gen. Ahmed Ali Fadel, whom he appointed as head of the Suez Canal Authority, replacing Ezzat Adel, 72, who held the post for the past 15 years. Before his appointment, Fadel, 58, was commander of the Egyptian navy. He is a veteran of the 1973 October War, and has been decorated for heroism and bravery. Mubarak also met with Maj. Gen. Ahmed Saber Selim, whom he named the new naval commander. Born in 1941, Selim also took part in Egypt's wars against Israel and was honoured for his outstanding performance. Maj. Gen. Fouad Sherif El-Qadi replaces Selim as navy chief-of-staff.

Blood racism

AN ISRAELI blood bank have been secretly destroying donations from Jews of Ethiopian origin for fear that the samples are infected with the HIV virus, the daily *Maariv* reported yesterday. The donors were not informed of the practice in order not to offend them.

Defending the action, the director of the Magen David Adom blood bank stated that the incidence of HIV infection among Ethiopians was 50 times higher than the national average. The bank, he added, did not have the technology to guarantee that blood donations are not infected with the virus. However, because he did not want to deprive donors of the money earned through selling blood, he kept the practice secret.

But, Adisso Massala, a leading figure in the Ethiopian community, denounced the reasons given as ridiculous, asserting that every Ethiopian immigrant was tested for AIDS before entering Israel. This, he said, was another example of Israeli racism against poor immigrants.

Egypt win

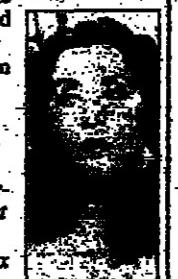
TOP soccer scorer Ahmed El-Kass gave Egypt a 1-0 win over South Africa in their last group A match and a quarter-final place in the African Nations Cup.

South Africa, the hosts, lead the group and play the runner-up in group B — either Algeria or Zambia — in the quarter-finals on Saturday in Johannesburg. Egypt, in second position, play the top team in group B — again either Algeria or Zambia — in Bloemfontein in Saturday's other quarter-final.

El-Kass scored twice in Egypt's opening win over Angola and heads the scoring chart with three goals. (see p.15)

Actress dies

VETERAN actress Fatima Rusdi, 86, known as the Sarah Bernhardt of the East, died on Tuesday following a heart attack in her downtown flat. She was one of Egypt's best stage and film actresses, taking her first bow at the age of ten. Rusdi's heyday was between the '30s and '50s. She starred in many films including *Al-Azma* (Determination), which ushered in realism in Egyptian cinema. She also played leading roles in prominent Egyptian adaptations of *Tosca*, *Julus Caesar*, *Hamlet* and *La Dame aux Camélias*.

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On to final status

A Palestinian state in 18 months? Yasser Arafat may be a little too optimistic, writes Mona Anis from Gaza

Yasser Arafat, after emerging victorious in landmark self-rule elections, was expected to urge Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres at a historic meeting last night for an early start of negotiations that could lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state. The meeting, at the Erez crossing separating the Gaza Strip from Israel, was the first between the two leaders since September's elections in which Arafat was overwhelmingly elected president, with more than 85 per cent of the vote, while Fatah-linked candidates took 75 per cent of the council's 88 seats.

Whenever Yasser Arafat and an Israeli prime minister meet, the parochial realities of Arafat's rule become apparent. His meeting with Shimon Peres yesterday was no exception.

Congratulations by Peres on Arafat's election as *ra'is* of the executive authority — a title tailored especially to avoid calling him president — aside, they discussed the release of Palestinian prisoners — a matter of embarrassment for Arafat because of Israeli delays — and the completion of a Hebron bypass road that would allow the Israeli army to pullout from Hebron by the end of March.

Peres appeared more interested, however, in the removal from the PLO's charter of clauses suggesting that the state of Israel should be replaced by a democratic state open to Jews, Muslims and Christians.

Arafat told a group of Egyptian journalists

on Tuesday that "the Palestinian state can be established within a year or a year-and-a-half at the latest." He also said negotiations with Israel on the "final status" of the Palestinian territories "will begin very soon," although they are not scheduled to open before May.

"There are contacts with the Israelis to establish an agenda which will include the question of Jerusalem, refugees, Jewish settlements and borders," Arafat said.

But Peres insists that the final-status talks will begin only once the PLO removes clauses in its charter that suggest that the existence of Israel should be brought to an end. "The Palestinian Authority must cancel this charter without wavering as it has pledged to do in the autonomy agreements signed with Israel in September," Peres said Tuesday.

In the September pact Arafat promised to amend the PLO charter within two months of the inaugural session of the new Palestinian legislative council, expected to be held in late February. To cancel the offending clauses, Arafat must call a meeting of the Palestine National Council (PNC), the PLO's parliament-in-exile. A two-thirds majority of the 630-member PNC is required to amend the charter. Israel on Saturday authorised all members of the PNC to return to the Palestinian territories for the meeting.

Peres threatened on Tuesday that the peace process might come to a halt unless the offending articles were removed from the PLO's charter, while Israeli Justice Minister David Libi was warned of "serious consequences" to the peace process.

"It is not in the interest of the Israelis to halt the peace process," retorted Gamal Al-Sourani, secretary of the PLO's 18-member Executive Committee, in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "If the Israelis want to live in peace, they must act as equals and not as superiors. The sole purpose of their demand is to humiliate us. This is too much."

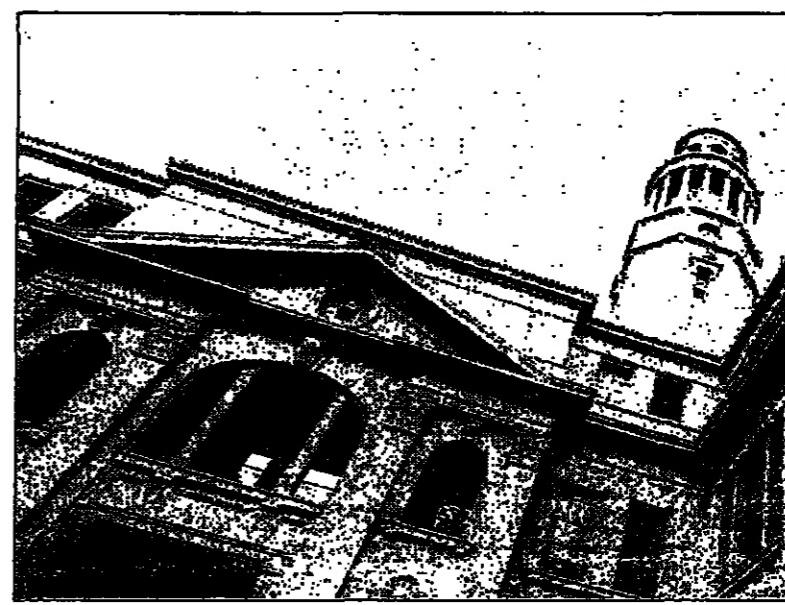
Sourani expressed the belief that "if the PNC meets, it is not going to change one word of the covenant, which does not call for the destruction of Israel, but rather the liberation of our homeland. I am sure that when the PNC meets, it will affirm its support for the policy of the PLO's Executive Committee in the current stage, which is based on the Palestinian Declaration of Independence announced in Algiers in 1988, accepting a two-state solution," he said.

Salim Zaanoun, acting speaker of the PNC, told the *Weekly*: "We are considering the convening of a session of the PNC 20 days after the final announcement of the election results, that is, after revoting in two polling stations where votes have been invalidated take place on 31 January." But this is going to be an ordinary session to initiate the legal procedures necessary to approve the membership of the 88 members of the self-rule council in the PNC, he said.

"As for abolishing articles in the covenant, this requires an emergency meeting dedicated solely to this purpose," Zaanoun said. "As acting speaker, I have to get a written request

from the PLO's Executive Committee specifying the date and the place for the requested emergency meeting. This is what the statutes of the PNC stipulate. I know that there are articles in the Taba agreement which stipulate the amendment of the articles clashing with the existence of the state of Israel before 20 March. But I have to get the written request of the PLO's Executive first. Only then can I call for the emergency meeting and form a legal committee to investigate the question of amending the covenant in accordance with the statutes of the PNC."

The debate over the covenant dramatises claims by Arafat's opponents that the agenda currently being followed is less Palestinian than Israeli. Arafat's supporters, meanwhile, take refuge in rhetoric addressing what is and is not possible given the balance of power. Caught between the two are more than a million voters, in the West Bank and Gaza, the vast majority of whom turned out to vote on Saturday, believing that their voice is needed if the Palestinian struggle is to move towards the goal of self-determination rather than acquiescence to Israel.



Heritage of a revolution

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak announced last week that the Gezira building which once served as headquarters of the Revolution Command Council (RCC), would be transformed into a museum of Egypt's post-1952 political history, reports Nevine Khalil. The two-storey, Nile-side building, which was used by King Farouk as a residence before the revolution, will be handed over to the Ministry of Culture in the next few weeks. The ministry will be responsible for renovating the neglected building and turning it into a high-tech, audio-visual museum with multilingual displays telling the story of the 1952 Revolution.

Beginning with the uprising of the Free Officers Movement, the museum will chronicle the revolution's turbulent history, confrontations and achievements. It will also document the eras of Egypt's presidents. According to Culture Minister Farouk Hosni, the museum will display some important possessions of these presidents, along with those of RCC members. Rare photographs and documents will be exhibited at the museum, which will also include a library of books, research papers and studies, along with works of art and literature inspired by the revolution. The ministry's Cultural Development Fund is financing the project.

('1952 as display', p.13)

Security talk on Syrian track

Security arrangements topped the agenda of the Syrian-Israeli peace talks which resumed yesterday

Syria and Israel resumed their peace talks yesterday as US Secretary of State Warren Christopher appealed to the two sides to begin making the compromises and deals deemed necessary to reach a settlement.

In an Associated Press interview, Christopher said the time for trade-offs between Syria and Israel and for the consideration of alternative proposals had arrived.

Security is a major item on the agenda, and it is hoped that the presence of military officials from Damascus and Jerusalem will help facilitate bargaining in this area.

It is the first time military experts have been included in the negotiating teams since the two sides resumed contact in late December.

"I look for progress to be made," said Christopher, who intends to join the talks later today.

Israel's goal, according to Foreign Minister Ehud Barak, was to ensure that it would not be feasible for the Syrians to launch surprise attacks across the Israeli border.

The objectives of security arrangements are threefold: to make surprise attacks on Israel practically impossible; to reduce the incentive for a full campaign against Israel or Syria; and to avoid the deterioration of daily clashes into full confrontation," he said in a television interview on Tuesday.

Israel was demanding "demilitarisation" zones on each side of the future border, Barak explained, together with Syrian troop reductions in certain areas, a satellite alert system providing satellite photographs and many ways of verification, observation and monitoring of each other's behaviour".

Barak would have preferred

to retain a ground presence, which in his view, would be the best and simplest way to achieve the kind of early warning we need". However, he conceded that he "would not exclude other ways". Previous talks between Syrian and Israeli military chiefs broke down in June over Israeli demands to leave an early warning station on the Golan.

The Damascus newspaper *Al-Baath*, mouthpiece of the ruling Baath Party, accused the Israeli government yesterday of "trying to get round the fundamental issues by imposing preconditions".

Israel, the newspaper said,

"has started to talk about old ideas again, such as the nature of peace, raising the level of negotiations, the normalisation of ties and water issues, all subjects which are not linked directly to the heart of the problem".

Barak would have preferred



KURASAT ISTRATIJIYA (32)



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Riyadh warning on Bahrain

Saudi Arabia warned the opposition in Bahrain against any attempt to stage an upheaval in that country

Amid tight security measures to crush a wave of unrest against the Bahrain government, Saudi Arabia served notice that it will not tolerate an upheaval in its fellow member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The warning came in a Saudi newspaper statement late on Tuesday that "troublemakers" had started 23 fires in the past two days, burning houses, cars, electricity generators, a commercial establishment and a private company. Dozens of other fires were reported earlier.

The statement said security forces were intensifying their campaign to dislodge saboteurs and troublemakers. Security has been stepped up outside public buildings, vital installations and private properties, making it possible for law and order forces to thwart a series of criminal acts."

The Bahraini army said on Saturday it was ready to intervene to crush the unrest if martial law was declared by the emir.

Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa.

The Saudi Arabian newspaper *Okaz*, reflecting Riyadh's official position, said: "We do not allow any party to plot against Bahrain and we warn against any attempt to create a new reality in this country." The newspaper added that "all countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council share Bahrain's concerns. Everything which happens in this country concerns them."

Two official Bahraini newspapers accused Shi'ite Iran on Sunday of fomenting the trouble, charges which were denied through the Iranian press.

Al-Nadwa, another Saudi newspaper, on Monday also accused Iran of being behind the trouble, and said that tension would continue in the region as long as Tehran's policy was based on "terrorism".

President Hosni Mubarak condemned the acts of protest as a "foreign intervention" in Bahrain's affairs, and an attempt to destabilise the six states of the GCC.

New style for a new cabinet

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri's new cabinet, whose members took the oath of office at the beginning of this month, includes only a handful of new faces. The majority of ministers are veterans of outgoing administrations. But during its first two weeks, the cabinet surprised many analysts by adopting new approaches and setting up what may be described as a new tradition of consulting with opposition leaders and newspaper editors.

El-Ganzouri set a precedent last Thursday by holding two separate meetings with leaders of opposition parties and chief editors of national and opposition newspapers, where he discussed political and economic issues, expounded the salient features of his government's policy and listened to the views of the participants.

In a departure from the position of his predecessor, Atef Sidki, El-Ganzouri was quoted as saying that he was a politician and not merely a technocrat. His cabinet will meet not only to review reports but to take decisions, El-Ganzouri was reported as saying.

"These meetings will be followed by others in which the prime minister will take time to explain government policies in detail and to answer questions regarding any disputed matter or decision", information

Minister Saifat El-Sherif told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "This is all part of the full implementation of the multi-party system advocated by President Hosni Mubarak."

El-Ganzouri's meetings with the opposition and the press covered a wide range of issues, including the switch to a free market economy, the main points of the nation's foreign policy and the proposed new press law.

Yassin Seragedin, leader of the Wafdist opposition in parliament, was optimistic that the meetings would usher in a new phase of good communication between the government and the opposition parties. "I was very happy with that meeting and I really felt that the new prime minister is going to adopt a new style of administration that will incorporate the viewpoints of the opposition", he told the *Weekly*. According to Seragedin, El-Ganzouri promised that the government's decision-making will not exclude the views of the opposition. "He also promised that we will be notified of the agenda of our next meeting in advance, so that we can study the issues and be well-prepared for the discussion", he added. El-Ganzouri also pledged that we will always have access to him, to discuss urgent matters or convey pressing complaints, either directly or via Kamal El-Shazli, minister of

state for parliamentary affairs.

At his meeting with the newspaper editors, El-Ganzouri acknowledged the important role played by a free press in reflecting the state's political discourse, criticising government inefficiencies and highlighting its achievements, according to Ibrahim Nafie, chairman of the Press Syndicate. Expressing appreciation for this new line of cooperation, Nafie said El-Ganzouri

would be having another meeting with senior editors to discuss the problems faced by the press organisations.

However, some opposition figures were not impressed, describing the meetings as a "public relations exercise" intended to improve the cabinet's image after the public was disappointed by the limited scope of the reshuffle. Others argued that the government was seeking to "tame the opposition forces that the government organised some two years ago", said another opposition figure. "There were meetings, but that was it."

According to political analyst Osama El-Ghazali Harb, it would be premature to dismiss the meetings as a mere "public relations exercise" since there is no established tradition of government-opposition and government-press re-

lationships. "We are still in the process of developing a pattern for these relationships", Harb said.

He was prepared to go further: "Whether the prime minister held the two meetings with the genuine intention of consultation or with the ulterior motive of winning the opposition and the press to his side during the coming phase of economic reform, it is still all right."

Minister El-Sherif insisted that the meetings had been organised with the best of intentions. He conceded, however, that no schedule for future meetings had been set. They would be held, he said, whenever the prime minister felt the need to meet with representatives of the opposition and the press.

In another departure from Sidki's policies, El-Ganzouri decided to bow to a ruling by the Supreme Constitutional Court that taxes paid by Egyptian expatriates were unconstitutional. El-Ganzouri ordered that the tax-payers be refunded.

"The government has started by scrapping all the negative decisions made by previous governments", El-Sherif said. "One example is its decision to reimburse expatriate tax-payers. What we have now is a new vision and a new style of administration that will usher our country into the 21st century."

Two weeks after he was sworn in, Kamal El-Ganzouri is emerging as a prime minister in his own right, quashing speculation that his cabinet would be a replica of Atef Sidki's outgoing administration. Dina Ezzat reports



Kamal El-Ganzouri

Ibrahim Nafie

Khaled Mohieddin

Ramadan sermons

The Ministry of Al-Awqaf (religious endowments) has a comprehensive plan to expound the true teachings of Islam during the holy month of Ramadan but whether it will be effective in fighting terrorism is an open question. Gilan Shahine seeks an answer



photo: Emad Abdel-Hafez

In an effort to correct misconceptions about the teachings of Islam, the new minister of Al-Awqaf (religious endowments), Mahmoud Hamdi Zalzouq, is overseeing plans for a series of lectures and discussions at mosques and public gatherings during the holy month of Ramadan.

The religious education campaign is an annual Ramadan event organised by the Ministry of Al-Awqaf, but this year, the Ministry of Culture is also taking part for the first time offering its arts' centres, as sites for public discussion.

Zalzouq, who served as deputy president of Al-Azhar University before joining the cabinet earlier this month, said that the true message of Islam would be expounded by well-versed scholars from Al-Azhar at 10 mosques in Cairo — including Al-Hussein in Islamic Cairo — two in the Giza governorate, and 14 others nationwide. Sermons will be held following afternoon prayers, while public discussions will follow the night prayers. Religious scholars will also visit prisons, police stations, social institutions, factories and companies to talk with inmates and employees.

"It is a positive step that religious and governmental authorities are joining hands to save society from certain prevailing misconceptions that have been used to justify and encourage terrorism", said Zalzouq.

"Fighting terrorism is one of the main targets of this campaign", he stressed. "Just as children are vaccinated against epidemics, we also have to immunise our young people against deviation and extremism. The meetings will give the Azharites the chance to come close to people, listen to them, understand their problems and hold discussions, all the while gently refuting misconceptions."

However, he does not want the theologians to push the anti-terrorism message too overtly. Sermons and discussions, he insisted, must be couched in an Islamic context. "Scholars should not devote an entire sermon to the need to combat terrorism", he said. "Instead, they should explain how the Qur'an and the teachings of the *Sunnah* (Prophet Mohamed's sayings and actions) show that Islam opposes violence and advocates peace and mercy."

However, some Islamic intellectuals have questioned whether these sermons really have any impact on war against terrorism. "These public gatherings have been around for a long time but terrorism still

persists", commented Faluji Howeidi, a writer on Islamic affairs. He pointed out that the preachers who deliver the sermons are, ultimately, government employees who have to reflect the government's viewpoint and speak within certain limits. "They have little credibility with many people", he asserted.

"The government should not assume the responsibility for enlightening people's minds. It should leave this task to society itself, by allowing people to express themselves freely and discuss the social and political problems which lie at the root of the phenomenon of terrorism."

Zainab Radwan, vice-dean of Cairo University's Faculty of Islamic Studies, agreed that the ministry's education campaign would be of no use in the fight against terrorism. "Terrorists are already against all of official bodies", she said. "The most this campaign can do is dissuade potential extremists from joining the radical groups."

She believed television would be a more effective medium for the government to get its message across. "To refute misconceptions about Islam, we must have access to people at all levels of society, particularly uneducated people who can be easily misled."

"I believe that a TV series tackling controversial religious and social issues, followed by expert discussions, would be a better way to reach the illiterate, who are hardly able to understand speeches in classical Arabic."

Other intellectuals complained that Al-Azhar preachers are isolated from daily life and its problems and are, therefore, unable to communicate with the public in any real sense. "I believe that before we think of preaching to the people, we have to prepare the preachers for the task", asserted Islamic thinker Ahmed Kamal Abul-Magid. "Nevertheless, I believe that these sermons are constructive in the sense that they help remind people of some forgotten virtues. They would be even more fruitful if they were delivered throughout the year, and not confined to the month of Ramadan."

In an effort to improve the preachers' performance, the ministry has begun a training programme for Azharite scholars to teach them the skills necessary to encourage constructive debate, particularly among young people, many of whom feel confused about contemporary issues. "This programme will introduce the scholars to various political theories, ideologies and social problems", explained Zalzouq. "We hope it will encourage them to take a broad-minded approach in the public debates."

However, away from the chosen mosques, thousands of others which are not affiliated to the ministry continue to pose a problem. It is estimated that out of Egypt's 50,000 mosques, about 30,000 fall outside the ministry's jurisdiction. These mosques are run by unqualified sheikhs, some of whom are extremists who propagate dangerous misconceptions, especially among the uneducated and impressionable.

"The ministry is fully aware of this problem and intends to bring these mosques under its supervision, hopefully by the end of this year", assured Zalzouq. "But for this Ramadan, the ministry will have to focus on densely-populated areas in order to access the greatest number of people."

The ministry's plan kicked off on Monday night with a grand ceremony in Al-Hussein district at which Zalzouq, Sheikh Gad El-Haq Ali Gad El-Haq, the rector of Al-Azhar Mosque, Sheikh Sayed Tamawi, the Mufti of the Republic, and Cairo Governor Omar Abdel-Akher presided. But the sermons and speeches they delivered mainly attracted Al-Azhar students and scholars rather than the general public. Tight security measures were in force, perhaps accounting for the absence of ordinary people.

In his speech, Sheikh Gad El-Haq stressed that all preachers should be aware of the mushrooming of religious misconceptions and un-Islamic customs, in order to be able to refute them. Governor Abdel-Akher promised that, in the coming sessions, he would discuss Cairo's problems and complaints "clearly and honestly".

While the official ceremony failed to attract grassroots Egyptians, other mosques were having a difficult time coping with the ever-increasing number of people coming to listen to sermons and seek guidance from preachers. "I come here every Ramadan", said Samih Said, a university graduate, at a Heliopolis mosque. "It gives me a sense of the spiritual and teaches me a lot about Islamic doctrine that modern society seems to have forgotten. Anyone can ask a question and receive an immediate answer."

Said was not interested in attending Al-Awqaf's educational sessions "because I won't feel free to discuss whatever comes to my mind, and because I don't want to hear hollow praise of the government".

Dovish hawk to guide Brotherhood

Mustafa Mashhour, widely believed to be a hawk seeking to project an image of moderation, has been chosen as the fifth Supreme Guide of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood following Hamed Abu-Nasr's death last Saturday at the age of 83. Mashhour, a one-time member of the Brotherhood's military arm that fought the British occupation forces in the 1940s, has been running the group's affairs for the past year and a half, while Abu-Nasr was ill. In an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Mashhour, 74, denied reports of a power conflict within the group, ruled out a policy change and demanded a dialogue with the government that would eventually lead to a reconciliation.

Mashhour had been widely expected to become Abu-Nasr's successor and his position was further confirmed when he led mourners at Abu-Nasr's funeral at Nasr City on Saturday. With Abu-Nasr's body lying in an open coffin and wrapped in a green cloth decorated with Qur'anic verses, the funeral procession began from the mosque of Rabe'a Al-Adawya. Mashhour marched at the head of the procession, holding hands with the Brotherhood's spokesman Maamoun El-Hodeibi, now expected to serve as the Supreme Guide's first deputy. Behind them were other Brotherhood figures, and opposition party leaders who had come to offer condolences.

The few thousand Brotherhood members who showed up for the funeral were not intimidated by the heavy police presence around the mosque. They dispersed immediately after the procession reached the waiting ambulance that was to transport Abu-Nasr's body to his final resting place, also in Nasr City.

In choosing the successor of Sheikh Abu-Nasr, the rules set by Imam Hassan El-Banna [who founded the group in 1928] were strictly ob-

served", Mashhour later told the *Weekly*. Indicating that his choice as leader had not been a subject of dispute, Mashhour pointed out that "for the past year and a half Sheikh Abu-Nasr, who was unable to carry out the leadership's responsibilities due to health problems, had delegated his authority to me".

Mashhour, who first joined the group in 1938, said he had received the *baylaq* (pledge of loyalty) from the outlawed Brotherhood's representatives throughout the Islamic world shortly before Abu-Nasr's death. "They either came personally or telephoned", he said.

Mashhour, who has a science degree, spent three years in prison under ex-King Farouk, after a car laden with explosives, probably for use against British occupation forces, was seized by police in 1948. Under the late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser, he was imprisoned twice, the first time for 10 years and the second for six.

The smooth transfer of power quashed rumours of a power conflict in the Brotherhood's highest echelons.

Mashhour, Hodeibi said, "is the best successor to Abu-Nasr, and there was a consensus to choose him as Supreme Guide. He had no opponents, no competitors and nobody objected to him."

Despite being known as a hardliner, Mashhour is seeking to project an image of moderation, declaring that *wasatiyyah* (centrism) would be the distinctive feature of the Brotherhood under his leadership, and that the group would seek to project its views in a moderate fashion.

He asserted that a shift in the group's basic policy was unlikely. "We are going to stick to the rules laid down by Hassan El-Banna", he said. "The implementation of Islamic *shari'a* remains our ultimate goal."

For the past two years, Mashhour said, the Brotherhood had suffered under the government's iron fist: its headquarters were shut down; Brotherhood members were sent for military trial; its candidates failed at the recent elections. "So, I believe that a dialogue is necessary at this stage. It is better than throwing our lot with other militant groups."

Not only did the outlawed Brotherhood want dialogue, it also wanted legality, according to Mashhour. It was with this aim, he said, that some of the group's members had applied to establish a new party under the name of Al-Wasat (Centre).

"We will not resort to violence or underground work", he assured. "We want to work in the open, so some young Muslim Brothers have applied to establish a new party. We are seeking to establish a newspaper and a headquarters, and we hope that the new party will provide us with this."

Mashhour's remarks ran counter to denials by Abu-Ela Madi, a prominent Brotherhood figure and the would-be founder of Al-Wasat, that the new party would be a front for the Brotherhood.

Mashhour also denied charges that the Brotherhood backed the military government of Omar Al-Bashir, or the leader of the Islamic Liberation Front, Hassan Al-Turabi, in Sudan. Egypt has accused Turabi of providing support for militant groups in several Arab countries, including the Egyptian Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, which claimed responsibility for the failed assassination attempt against President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa last June. "We sometimes attend conferences there", conceded Mashhour, "but this does not mean we support Sudan's political stand or

its alleged involvement in hosting terrorist groups."

Although outlawed since 1954, the Brotherhood has staged a political comeback over the past decade. The group forged an alliance with the Wafdist Party in 1984 and with the Labour and Liberal parties in 1987, winning a respectable number of parliamentary seats in the general elections of those years. It gained additional clout by winning control of several professional syndicates, such as the Bar Association and the doctors and engineers syndicates.

Some Brotherhood opponents fear that Mashhour's background as a member of the group's secret military arm could push the group towards further militancy. But this possibility was discounted by political analyst Mohamed El-Sayed Said.

Ever since Brotherhood members were released by Anwar El-Sadat in the early 1970s, Said said, the group's strategy had been to regain legitimacy and project itself as an organisation that seeks change through peaceful means. The latest government clampdown had not led to any apparent change in the Brotherhood's claimed position on the rejection of violence.

Experts on Brotherhood affairs, including Said, believe the group is currently made up of three generations of brothers. The older generation includes a handful of El-Banna associates, who are now in their 70s. A middle generation of younger members in their 40s was responsible for the group's policy of taking over civil institutions such as the professionals' syndicates. Several of them were sent to jail by military courts after being convicted of seeking to revive the activities of an outlawed organisation. The younger generation is mainly composed of university students.

Said believed that the survival of the Brotherhood rests in the hands of the middle generation. He views this generation as politically moderate and ready to accept the existence of other political groups.

"Since the mid-'70s and early '80s, the middle generation have been the ones who actually practised politics and built up relationships with other political groups", said Said. "The older generation gave their blessings."

The bid to establish the new party came as no surprise to Hala Mustafa, another expert on Islamist groups. Mustafa said the Brotherhood has always sought to take control of other political parties to prove its presence. "Even the fact that Al-Wasat has Christians among its membership is nothing new", added Mustafa. "This was a policy forged a long time ago by El-Banna for public consumption."

Describing the Brotherhood as a pragmatic group whose leadership had its head down when the wind was blowing against it, Mustafa agreed that it was unlikely that the group would resort to violence or introduce major policy changes following Abu-Nasr's death.

"The group is having a crisis in its relationship with the government at present", she said. "As in the previous crises in the 1950s and '60s, the Brotherhood will not seek confrontation. Instead, it will act to strengthen its ranks and wait for the right time to stage a comeback".

However, she added: "This does not mean that the Brotherhood has ended its strong links, whether direct or indirect, with terrorist groups".

The Brotherhood, she said, was the mother organisation of all the militant groups currently perpetrating violence against the state.

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Gama'a threatens US

The underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya threatened action against US targets after its spiritual leader was sentenced to life imprisonment in an American court. Shaden Shehab reviews the case and sounds out the reaction of experts

The militant Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya threatened to hit American interests and personnel in "blow for blow" to avenge the sentence of life imprisonment passed by an American court against its spiritual leader, Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman.

The blind and diabetic Abdel-Rahman and nine of his associates were convicted of conspiracy to blow up the United Nations and FBI buildings in New York, tunnels linking Manhattan and New Jersey and the George Washington bridge. Abdel-Rahman was also found guilty of plotting to assassinate President Hosni Mubarak during a visit to the United States.

Eight of those convicted received long prison terms ranging between 25 and 57 years. The ninth defendant, El-Sayed Nossair received a life sentence for the 1990 murder of radical Rafiq al-Mekhane in a Manhattan hotel.

Investment is the nub of Egypt's economic reform programme as the country prepares for the 21st century. Incentives to increase investment top the economic agenda at all levels — from President Mubarak on down

Ganzouri moves on investment

For roughly five years, Egypt has been walking down the path of economic reform, attempting to privatise public sector industries, revamp fiscal policies, promote exports and encourage productivity in the country's various industrial sectors.

Encouraging foreign and domestic investment has been a key part of this programme, either by luring multinational corporations to Egypt's shores through, for example, tax incentives, or by attempting to increase worker remittances from abroad. And, for the most part, the gains accrued from these policies have been encouraging. The government is committed to reform and has been joined by representatives of the private sector in realising some of the goals laid out in 1991 when the reform programme was first launched.

But increased investment takes planning coupled with legislative action, which is just what the Cabinet did last week when it issued a series of 14 decrees aimed at boosting the country's economic performance, increasing incomes and promoting investment by regulating the activities of a number of sectors.

The new decisions swept the board in terms of fiscal and sectoral reforms, touching on customs duties and sales taxes, worker remittances, housing and tourism. And, on the whole, they were well received by members of the business community.

"We are satisfied with what we got," said Mahmoud Fahmi, a legal expert and head of the Egyptian Businessmen's Investment Committee. "We should not risk the government."

Fahmi, who played a key role in drawing up many of Egypt's liberalisation laws, said that all of the Cabinet's 14 decrees will work strongly in favour of investment. "We should not view investment simply as projects, but as a development of the society as a whole," he said. One concrete example of this, he noted, is the decree about housing rentals. The Cabinet had agreed to draft law requiring the application of civil law on new rentals in vacant apartment blocks, regardless of when the buildings were constructed. Under the old system, rents for

A series of new decisions issued by cabinet ministers recently had investors cheering and calling for more. **Nivine Wahish** reports

old building were fixed and could not be increased except by law. This new system, which operates according to supply and demand, will make housing available for citizens.

But eclipsing the housing decree were several others issued by the Cabinet, foremost among them a pledge to take the necessary procedures to enact President Mubarak's decision to allow investors to set up projects, regardless of their capital, without having to secure the Investment Authority's (IA) permission. Now, investors only have to inform the IA of their desire to set up a project.

To stimulate the entry of capital goods into the country, the Cabinet also decided to slash customs on capital goods from 20-75 per cent down to 10 per cent.

Cheering this decision, Fahmi explained that the high customs rates were unjustified since these goods are necessary for the establishment of factories and domestic ventures and, therefore, are indispensable.

Another decree complementing the customs order was issued, stating that no new tariffs or increases in current tariffs were to be charged except by law. Moreover, immediate refunds are to be made for any duties collected in a manner inconsistent with this decree.

Realising that encouraging expatriate Egyptians to return home on vacations would serve to stimulate investment by bringing money into the country, the Cabinet announced the all money collected from Egyptians working abroad through the Expatriate Tax would be refunded in three annual instalments.

"This is a major step," said Fahmi, adding that expatriates often opted against returning to Egypt during their vacations for fear of having to pay additional taxes. "This deprived the Egyptian market of money these expatriates would have spent here during their stay."

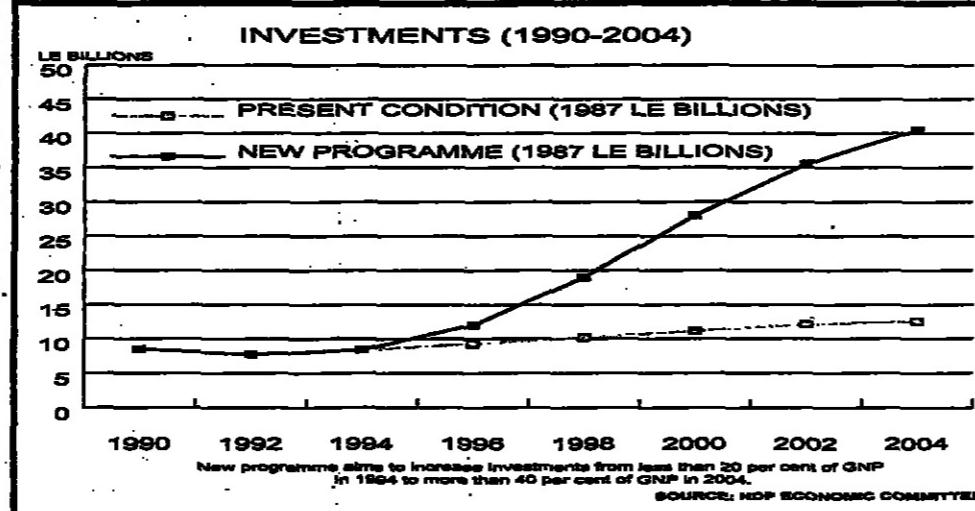
It also discouraged them from placing their savings in Egyptian banks or investing them in projects in the country," he stated.

Moving on to the issue of land sales, the Cabinet approved a draft law regulating the distribution of desert land for use in either establishing new projects or expanding existing ones. The land would either be given free-of-charge to

necessary to secure investment licenses.

These two decisions were supplemented by the Cabinet's decision to establish a higher committee charged with carrying out a national legislative reform programme.

Further helping investors find a suitable project in which to invest their capital, the Cabinet also announced the establishment of a data base that will help target potential areas of investment. Similarly, the ministers decreed that an office in each governorate would be set up to serve investors, with each governor responsible for over-



the necessary facilities and exemptions in order to provide them with the incentive to create new jobs, he said.

Mubarak underlined the importance of small industrial projects, noting that these initiatives helped create jobs for Egyptian youths and fuel investment.

Minister of the Public Enterprise Sector Atef Ebeid said that in order to increase investment, loss-making companies need to become profit-making enterprises. And, said Zafer El-Beshri, minister of planning for the country's economy to improve, its rate of growth must exceed by four times the population growth rate. But for this growth to materialise, he said, people must be encouraged to save and foreign investment must be solicited. In this way, government funding can be decreased and the private sector will be able to receive the financing it requires.

Concerning the role played by Egyptian banks to increase investment in Egypt, Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, chair-

man of the Federation of Egyptian Banks, said that banks had devised a new policy mainly aimed at discouraging clients from depositing their money in bank accounts by decreasing the interest rate.

"Moreover, in order to encourage depositors to direct investors, the banks sometimes share a percentage of the capital with their clients," he added. "We have already formed 100 such Egyptian companies through this partnership."

However, Abdel-Aziz pointed out that the main obstacles impeding investment in Egypt are onerous tax requirements, which can be as much as 40 per cent, and a bureaucratic system which overwhelms business.

Sadiq Afifi, a professor at Cairo University, said the ultimate purpose of the NDP was to bring prosperity to Egypt in the 21st century. This could be achieved by increasing incomes, and an equitable distribution of income and realising prosperity.

Finance Minister Mohamed El-Gharib said that the role of the Ministry of Finance was to encourage investment, promote exports and implement a fair taxation system by striking a balance between the wishes of the tax authority and taxpayers.

El-Gharib declared that in accordance with President Mubarak's directives, a comprehensive study was now being discussed on the subject of exports, in order to reduce the burden shouldered by investors to better prepare them for the competition that will come about as a result of GATT.

Samir Tobar, head of the Economic and Financial Affairs Committee, said that the next stage of Egypt's economic policy should concentrate on increasing the investment rate to 40 per cent of the total national income within the next decade.

Pushing investment

Officials and ministers have pledged to devote government efforts to make investors' lives easier, reports **Mona El-Fiqi**

Deputy prime minister and minister of agriculture, Youssif Wali, inaugurated the Fifth Annual Economic Conference organised by the National Democratic Party (NDP). In the opening address of the two-day conference entitled "A future vision of national action", Wali declared that the government would embark on a new phase of productivity after the fiscal reforms initiated by the previous government are completed.

He said that the NDP's economic committee was studying the Middle Eastern, Mediterranean and Islamic markets which Egypt could enter.

On the second day of the gathering, President Hosni Mubarak held a meeting with the delegates in which he declared that Egypt was now open for investment. The government was ready to offer investors all the necessary facilities and exemptions in order to provide them with the incentive to create new jobs, he said.

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GATT worries

A Cairo University conference highlighted the implications of the Uruguay Round of GATT on developing countries. **Mariz Tadros** attended

The implications of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) for Arab countries was the topic of discussion in a three-day conference organised by Cairo University's Economics Department.

Kicking off the first session of the conference, which was held from 13-15 January, Alieddin Hilal, dean of Cairo University's Faculty of Economics and Political Science, said: "We have gone beyond the question of whether Arab countries should join the GATT, and are now at a point where we have to ask ourselves, what role should Arab nations play in future GATT negotiations." Hilal's comments were directed at an august audience including Hamaa Kheir El-Din, chairperson of Cairo University's Economics Department, the guest of honour, State Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali and several economics experts from Egyptian, Arab and Western universities. Hilal added: "We no longer have the freedom to say that we accept or reject the clauses of the Uruguay Round since it has become an essential international trade document. Those countries which cannot benefit from the Uruguay Round will wake up to an unpleasant reality after the transitional period."

Youssef Boutros Ghali argued that the Uruguay Round had increased GATT's legitimacy by "enforcing its regulatory role in international trade so that it is now, more than ever, rule-based". He added that "the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) raised GATT's dispute settlement efficiency, although, of course, there are countries which have shown disrespect for it such as the US and Japan. However, they are exceptions to the rule."

Ghali also warned about the repercussions to Egypt, and Third World countries should they fall behind in the deregulation of their economies. "Unless Egypt continues with its market liberalisation policies which began in the 1990s," he said, "the benefits which we can gain from the Uruguay Round will be insubstantial. Third World countries must speed up their economic integration program so that the requirements for the 2005 GATT round would be achieved in a much shorter time frame than the allotted period, otherwise they would find themselves in the same boat, and Egypt, I believe, is capable of accelerating its reforms."

Further assessment of the impact of the Uruguay Round on developing countries was presented by Raed Safadi, who spoke of the "potential points of difference between the governments' desire to maintain the upper regulatory hand and the global pressures to accelerate liberalisation of economies". He argued that for "developing countries, the concept of 'fair trade' as opposed to 'free trade' was crucial as it allowed weak economies to retain a limited right to be treated according to their circumstances. In this way, negotiations with countries with strong economies may be conducted on more equitable grounds in terms of trade activities".

Safadi argued further that the increasing globalisation of economies means that no single government can claim to yield full control over its domestic economy, since the nature of international trade renders governments more answerable to each other. The problem, according to Safadi, does not lie with trade itself but with government policies that determine the flow of trade. The Uruguay Round document highlighted this trend well when it called upon governments to respond internally to the regional and multilateral concerns of its labour abroad, the environment and so forth, he said.

The Economic Research Forum's Heba Handoussa, in her talk, posed the question: Since the Uruguay Round revolves around a compendium of rules and regulations, do we need more lawyers than economists? She argued that Egypt's and some Arab nations' status as developing countries is a double-edged sword. "While the transitional period allows developing countries to temporarily continue to receive subsidies, they are also under pressure to liberalise their economies, subjecting them to strong competition." Handoussa added that "the Uruguay Round has highlighted the need for developing countries to balance the inflow of foreign investment in domestic markets and the need to increase foreign exports. Perhaps we have some lessons to learn from Southeast Asian countries."

Following Handoussa's comments, a paper submitted by Azza Radwan raised a number of questions about how Arab countries involved in the textile and clothing industry will be affected by the specific industrial clauses in the Uruguay Round document. Radwan's paper highlighted the ramifications of the agreement on Arab textiles as a result of increased competition in international markets. Where items continue to be under restrictive clauses, Arab textile exports abroad will flourish. According to Radwan, the liberalisation of markets in textile exporting countries will have negative repercussions for Arab textile exports. Radwan emphasised that since the European Union is the largest importer of textiles from Arab countries and grants them preferential treatment, the reduction of tariffs in European markets under the Uruguay agreement will mean that Arab textile industries will no longer enjoy these benefits.

Radwan pointed out that closer trade links between Eastern and Western Europe will be an additional burden for Arab textile industries competing in EU markets.

However, Radwan pointed out, the EU may find that once its markets are opened up to foreign textile industries, it would be in its best interests to leave the manufacture of cheap and traditional textile goods to foreign countries and focus instead on the production of high-tech textile industries. This would allow Egyptian textile industries and those of other developing countries, to benefit.

The flip side of the coin, on the other hand, would be that Arab countries like Egypt may be forced to reverse many of their protectionist measures in order to comply with guidelines called for in the Uruguay Round, such as decreasing tariffs and abolishing some quantitative restrictions. As a result, local competition will increase to the disadvantage of local industries.

Although significant emphasis was placed on the textile industry, the real focus of attention was on how the Uruguay Round would affect the agricultural sectors of the Arab world. This issue was made particularly relevant given the substantial differences in the agricultural sectors in varying Arab countries, and the fact that the effect of these talks on the industry is closely tied to fluctuating prices on the international market.

While some participants argued that the implications of the agreement would mainly be negative, others stated that the impact would be inconsequential and that there is room for developing countries to profit from the agreement. In Hoda El-Sayed's paper on the implications of the Uruguay Round on Egypt's foreign trade of agricultural products, she argued that Egyptian agricultural exports may benefit from the lifting of protectionist measures in foreign markets. This would be enhanced by the fact that Egypt, like other developing countries, will continue to reserve the right to offer export subsidies for agricultural products. Developed countries are not granted such privileges.

But she also stated in her paper, the increased access to overseas markets will have differing effects on Egyptian consumers and Egyptian agricultural workers. The reduction of customs tariffs and the abolition of some quantitative restrictions means that Egyptian markets will be flooded by a variety of cheap agricultural products. However, domestic produce and corresponding industries will be subject to increased competition. In essence, this was the major point of contention in the conference. Would increased competition lead to higher quality and product diversification, or simply expose Egypt's agricultural sector to problems in the domestic market? The other point raised was whether liberalisation would exacerbate the balance of trade deficit?

The question of how to alleviate the possible negative consequences resulting from the Uruguay Round was much less controversial, with most participants agreeing that a more unified regional approach during the next GATT forum would strengthen the position of individual Arab countries.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

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THE FIFTH round of negotiations on the proposed Egyptian-EU Partnership Agreement ended early last week with Ambassador Gamal Bayoumi, head of the Egyptian delegation to the talks describing this round as "the most successful yet", reported Nivine Wahish.

According to Bayoumi, the two sides revised, for the second time, the full text of the proposed agreement. The first revision was made during the fourth round of negotiations. Both sides also went over the already agreed upon points. "More than 60 per cent of the articles of the agreement have already been covered," said Bayoumi.

During this round of talks, the Egyptian team presented their demands regarding exporting agricultural products and agro-business. "Negotiations on this issue are very thorny," he said. By adding this new chapter, the Egyptian side seeks to secure full pension rights and social in-

surance for Egyptians in Europe. The chapter also aims at facilitating procedures and ensuring the rights of migrant Egyptian workers in Europe. Another aim is to facilitate visa procedures for those, like businessmen, who stand to benefit from the agreement.

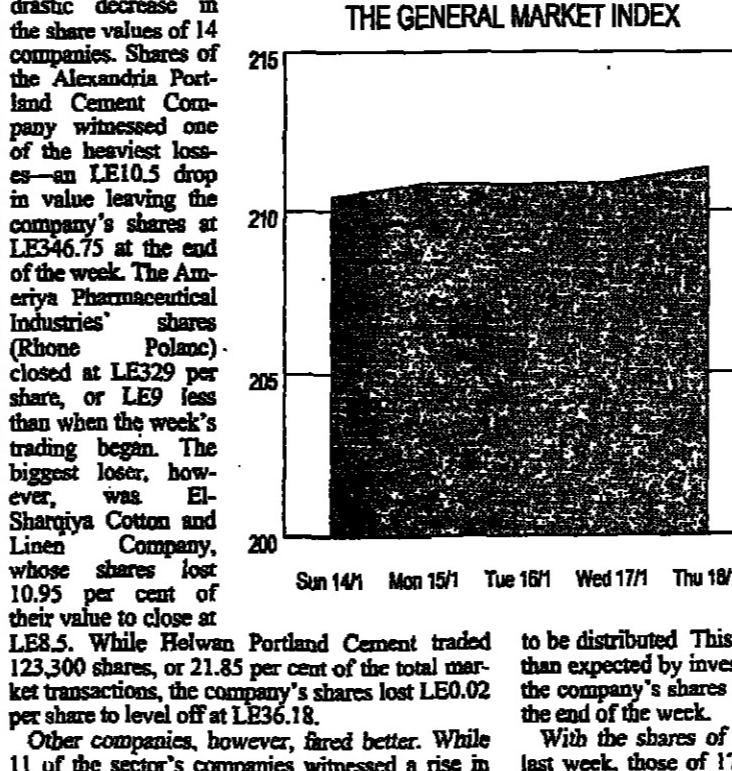
According to Bayoumi, the upcoming rounds, the Egyptian team will continue to tackle the issue of agricultural exports and to discuss financial cooperation in order to achieve "transparency in the policy of European cooperation".

The EU has pledged ECU4.7 billion in grants and a similar amount in credits to all the Mediterranean countries. No single country will be allocated a fixed amount. Instead, each country will be obliged to prepare a number of projects for which it requires financing. Based on the feasibility of these projects, the funding may be provided.

The financial sector's index also witnessed a drop, slipping by 1.31 points to level at 222.31. For the second week in a row, shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) suffered a decline in value, this time falling by LE1 to close at LE484. However, the total value of CIB's shares traded dominated the market as LE10.39 million of the bank's shares changed hands. These transactions accounted for 21 per cent of total transactions on the market. The Faisal Islamic Bank lost LE8.75 to close at LE81.25.

Marking its highest trading volume since it floated 10 per cent of its shares last July, 15,000 shares of the Heliopolis Housing and Development Company exchanged hands last week following an announcement that a LE23 dividend was to be distributed. This dividend, which was higher than expected by investors, pushed up the value of the company's shares by LE45 to reach LE245 by the end of the week.

With the shares of 79 companies being traded last week, those of 17 increased in value, 31 decreased and another 31 remained unchanged.





Palestinian workers clean candidates' posters off walls in Gaza, signalling the end of an election that has dramatically changed the course of Palestinian history (photo: Reuters)

Votes for statehood

In the jostling crowds outside polling stations, Graham Usher discovered that most Palestinians in the West Bank were voting for national, rather than local, issues

A young woman in an orange *hijab* listens intently while a Palestinian election official explains the intricacies of the ballot paper. After a few queries, she crosses to a makeshift cardboard booth, marks four names out of a list of 29 and votes, once in a white box for the new Palestinian council and once in a red box for the president.

She smiles. Very likely it is the first time she has voted in her life. But, like hundreds of thousands of Palestinians across the West Bank, she is not voting simply for Arafat or his female opponent Samha Khalil or for 88 candidates to take up seats on the new council; she is voting for statehood.

The polling station is in Ta'amari, a small West Bank village cut into the hills near Bethlehem. The village is small, with around 2,500 eligible voters. Most will vote, says Maftouh Salah, an unemployed graduate from the village.

It certainly looks that way. In Ta'amari's single schoolyard, women jostle in queues outside two classrooms, converted into polling stations for the day. Two Palestinian police with locked guns and mobile phones patrol. But the only real disorder is that caused by enthusiasm. It is an enthusiasm tempered by realism.

"I don't think the elections will change much," says Salah. "Our village is tiny and near no settlements. So we're not exactly a priority for either Israel or the Palestinian Authority. But we want an improvement in services — there is no clinic here and we don't have a single telephone line."

But parochial concerns do not dominate these elections, whether in Ta'amari or the West Bank generally. Most Palestinians are voting for candidates with a strong history in the national struggle, who will stand firm on is-

sues like ridding the West Bank of Jewish settlements and claiming Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem. But Palestinians are also voting for the kind of nation they want to be.

"I shall vote for one candidate from my *hamula* [clan], one whose politics I agree with and one Christian," says Salah. "Even though our village is 100 per cent Muslim, we cannot fail prey to secularism."

Secularism, however, is very much in evidence in Hebron — "the last remaining occupied Palestinian city in the West Bank," says Fatah candidate Rafiq Natashah. The contrast with Ta'amari is stark.

In a school-cum-polling station near Hebron's old city, there are more election officials than voters. Turnout is low. It is easy to see why. The school has smashed windows. On shop fronts opposite, there are freshly daubed stars of David. "The

settlers had a protest against the elections last night," says one official wearily.

Amid the warren of streets that lie in the shadow of Hebron's Ibrahim Mosque, Israeli soldiers and border police are everywhere — perched on rooftops, patrolling alleyways, checking IDs to see whether a person is Muslim or Christian or Jewish. The army says this is necessary to ensure the safety of the 230 or so Jewish settlers that have squatted in various houses in the old city. But such a massive demonstration of military might is incompatible with democracy. "How can we express our opinion under colonialism," says one Hebronite who, unsurprisingly, will not vote.

A group of orthodox Jews pass by the school, down from Jerusalem "in solidarity with the Jewish city of Hebron". To walk this tall the group requires an escort of three police jeeps and one army personnel carrier. "If we want peace, we

must live together," says the group leader. He has a M-16 rifle slung over his shoulder.

On the road up from Hebron to Jerusalem sits Aroub, a small camp with around 7,000 refugees. The camp is solidly Fatah, so turnout is expected to be high. The recently returned Fatah leader and Hebronite, Abbas Zaki, is especially popular. Outside Aroub's main United Nations Relief and Works Agency school, young Fatah activists discuss the elections.

"The vote will legitimise Oslo, and that's good," says one. "But Oslo is only an interim agreement. We want candidates who will raise our case and that of all refugees. Let's be honest, to improve the services here, the first thing any authority would do is pull down the camp."

"Exactly," says another. "But we don't want improved services; we want to return."

Palestinians began a new chapter in their history when they went to the polls for the first time last Saturday to elect a president and the new 88-member Palestinian Council. Al-Ahram Weekly correspondents provide eye-witness accounts of the elections and gauge the reaction of the Palestinian people across the board. From the streets of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem to the refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, Palestinians — Fatah supporters and rejectionists of the Oslo agreements — spoke of their expectations and concerns

Gaza queues

Saturday's election for the first Palestinian legislative council was a day of queues, high turnouts and celebration, writes Tarek Hassan from Gaza

Election day on Saturday saw Gazans in jubilant mood, with the appearance of the sun after days of rain and hail — seen by many as a good omen — adding to the general good spirits. Polling stations were crowded all day, beginning at 7am, when the polls opened. Waiting voters demonstrated patience and a willingness to form orderly queues, a trend much admired by foreign observers.

For the voters, election day was clearly a momentous occasion. "At last we are exercising our right to elect our representatives, just like other people who we've heard about or seen on TV", said Hazim Sobhi Marouf, a 19-year-old student outside a polling station at Al-Khalil school for girls in Gaza City. Nida Shabani, a housewife, agreed. "I am so thrilled that I am going to vote," she said. "It is so exciting to feel for once that we are citizens with rights just like anybody else."

Even the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) found itself unable to waste this opportunity of mass political participation. Hours before the elections, Hamas climbed down from its position of advocating a total boycott, instead advising supporters to vote for "patriotic elements", including, of course, Hamas members running as independents. Nevertheless, no popular Hamas figures appeared at the polling stations.

Turnout was highest in the five constituencies in the Gaza Strip. All five registered over 90 per cent, the highest turnout among the 16 constituencies participating in the election.

Gaza's Khan Younis constituency was no exception. Queues outside the polling stations did not seem to be moving at all. "I told them from the beginning that we needed more than two boxes per polling station", said an exasperated General Abu Hamid, general commander of the Palestinian army in the southern sector of the strip. The number of ballot boxes allocated to each polling station, he said, had been decided by international observers. The problem was compounded by large voting cards, which filled the boxes quickly.

The voting process encountered more serious problems in the constituency of North Gaza, particularly in the Ghalia (B) district, where accusations of interference resulted in a decision by the Central Election Committee (CEC), chaired by Abu Misra, to set this district's ballot boxes aside. There was a similar incident at Deir Al-Balah polling station in the constituency of central Gaza. Incidents of alleged interference could generally be attributed to factional and tribal prejudices, and the CEC tried to contain the damage by immediate investigation and prompt action — such as the withdrawal of the ballot boxes at Ghalia.

A prominent feature of the election was the large number of women voting, a fact often noted by journalists and observers, who compared the mass participation here with the generally low women's turnout for elections in other Arab countries. "It's only natural", Arafat was reported to have commented. "Each Palestinian woman is worth many men".

According to Issa Al-Nazal, president of the electoral committee in Rafah, the high turnout of both sexes, "was a reflection of the high degree of political awareness among the Palestinians, and their insistence on having a strong voice in the building of Palestine's future".

While this is undoubtedly true, it must not be forgotten that some of the highest turnouts were in areas where candidates from influential families were running, and that turnout was higher in rural areas, where patronage plays a greater role, than in urban centres.

Making election day a public holiday also allowed all groups — families, tribes, or political parties — to fully mobilise their forces. While numerous voters made their own way to the polling stations, many others were given a lift by car or bus.

However, claims that tribalism and factionalism were the only factors in these elections do not appear justified. Voters were quick to insist that they had chosen candidates on merit. "I voted for the candidate whose presence on the council I thought would make a difference", said Khatem Abid from Gebalya refugee camp. "My sole criterion was the patriotic and academic record of the candidates, and not their family name or tribal allegiances."

Elections under siege

It was soldiers rather than voters that filled the streets of East Jerusalem on Saturday, reports Julie Till from Jerusalem

The military moved in on election day. Armed Israeli border guards and regular police set up camp outside East Jerusalem's post offices. It was a show of force designed to send Palestinians a clear message about who was in control.

At the tiny Mount of Olives post office, usually staffed by just two employees, four soldiers stood immediately outside the door. Another three looked down from the rooftop at those waiting to vote. Another 30 spread themselves along the sidewalk.

Two private security guards, hired by the Israeli postal service, checked identity cards as Palestinians queued up to vote. "It is a violation of Oslo II to do so," said Dutch international observer Michael Renfrew, "but because it is Jerusalem, Israel claims it can check IDs wherever it wants. It seems they decided to do it at the door."

On top of this human surveillance, there were also video cameras filming those coming to vote. It was, said Faisal Hussein, minister for Jerusalem affairs, "more like an army base than a place for

voting".

At the main post office in Salah Eddin, steel barricades were used for most of the day, allowing Israeli soldiers to control the entry of voters. One frustrated Palestinian, 17-year-old Ashraf Suliman, asked aloud, "The elections belong to us, not to them. How can they stop us?"

According to election observer Yizhar Be'er, director of the Israeli human rights group Betselem, the massive police and army presence reflected "the gap between the peace process on paper and the minds of Israeli security forces."

It seemed that Israeli security forces had no idea, or chose to ignore, what is on that paper. According to the Oslo II agreement, domestic Palestinian monitors, accredited by the Palestinian Central Elections Commission, are allowed to enter the polling stations to observe election procedures. But according to the Israeli soldier who arrested Zakaria Oudi, a Palestinian domestic monitor, "Whoever votes for the left is not part of the Israeli nation," read one banner. "We'll rid Israel of the Leftists who are selling the land," said another.

The elections in Jerusalem were about we do what we want," Oudi was released two hours later.

For successful candidate Hanan Ashrawi, the Jerusalem elections, though the most difficult, were also the most significant. "The battle for Jerusalem started when we got an [electoral] constituency and people started to vote. It is the beginning of the restoration of its ties with the rest of the Palestinian nation."

It is a prediction which the Israeli right shares and fears. But it could only mobilise around 10,000 supporters for a demonstration in West Jerusalem after the polls closed on Saturday. As speaker Rabbi Haim Druckman vowed that "We will return to Bethlehem, to Nablus, to Ramallah... to all of Eretz Israel", protesters carried banners whose slogans were directed more against the Israeli left and Peres' government than the Palestinians. "Whoever votes for the left is not part of the Israeli nation," read one banner. "We'll rid Israel of the Leftists who are selling the land," said another.

The elections in Jerusalem were about symbols and "people here are very nervous about symbols" said Be'er. Those symbols included the size, shape and description of the ballot boxes. A kind of Orwellian double-speak evolved to cater for Israeli sensitivities about the elections. "It was a non-vote on a non-ballot paper in a non-ballot box," commented Ian Blackley, spokesman for the European Union's election monitors.

But it was a vote, and in many cases it was a difficult one to make. Ashrawi described how "despite the obstacles, Jerusalemites made it to the polls, going from one polling station to another so they could exercise their right to vote".

However, not all Jerusalemites did. The voter turnout in Jerusalem was the lowest in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Only 40.37 per cent of those registered in Jerusalem actually voted. The average for the West Bank as a whole was 65.46 per cent.

Israeli Interior Minister Moshe Shahal said that the low turnout indicated that the majority of Palestinians wanted Jerusalem to be united and under Israeli sovereignty. But there are perhaps more convincing arguments. There were the practical difficulties. The five polling stations inside East Jerusalem could only accommodate approximately 4,400 of the 56,000 registered voters. The rest had to vote outside of the municipal boundaries. There was also the massive military presence and the leaflet and poster campaign by Likud supporters warning that to vote meant risking residency rights and welfare benefits.

But there were also political objections. There has been no redeployment of troops in Jerusalem; the repeated closure of Jerusalem has affected trade; and there are the day-to-day small-scale indignities of occupation.

Outside Erez Eddin post office, among the Palestinians watching events, small pockets of Palestinians debated the rights and wrongs of voting. "How can you vote," asked one young Palestinian to another, "when your brothers and sisters are still in jail?" Another pointed to the soldiers and asked, "How can you have elections without freedom?"

Tarek Hassan and Julie Till profile a selection of winning and losing candidates in the elections for the Palestinian Council

Fatah's Islamic flower

Rafiq Al-Natshah
(Winner — Hebron)

THE MANY faces of Fatah wear an Islamic cap in Hebron. Successful Fatah candidate Rafiq Al-Natshah, whose Fatah nom de guerre is Abu Shaker, reflects the Islamic nationalist mood of this city. His campaign literature calls for the *shari'a* to be used as the basic instrument for the revision of Palestinian laws and constitution.

But Abu Shaker differs from his Hamas colleagues. In a city paralysed by the presence of armed settlers, he believes it is time for the gun to take a holiday. It is a time of change, he says, and no more so than in the ranks of Fatah itself. "Fatah," says Abu Shaker, "is like an amphibian." It is mid-way between revolution and government. "If we fail [in the political process], then it will move back to the land rather than sink in the sea."

A well-educated, smartly dressed businessman, Abu Shaker returned from political exile in 1994. His platform calls for the national economy to be built "in the interests of all classes and all our people". But this spirit of unity may not last very long inside his own movement.

Abu Shaker argues that the Palestinian Council will not be a mere spectator to events. Its influence will however depend on the strength of individual members.

Fifty of its 88 members will be candidates who stood on official Fatah party lists. Another 15 Fatah activists, many of whom won local Fatah primaries but were later pushed off the list by PLO and Fatah leader Yasser Arafat, ran as independents. "We are all flowers in one garden," said Shaker, "but sometimes the gardener chooses the flowers".

However, the gardener may be in for a few surprises, he warns. "Some of the flowers have very sharp thorns. They are not so easily picked."

Hand-picked minister

Zakariya Al-Agha
(Loser — Khan Younis)

AN OBVIOUS example of the inefficiency and uncertainty of some of the high-profile PNA members is former Minister of Housing Zakariya Al-Agha.

Boasting an influential family background, he was one of those candidates hand-picked by Arafat, but his choice to run in the elections was opposed by many Fatah members.

At Arafat's insistence, however, Al-Agha and five others were selected for candidacy by Fatah's Central Committee.

Between last Saturday and Monday, Al-Agha's campaign was the talk of the Strip and the source of much debate among Palestinians throughout the self-rule areas. It is in this light that those who opposed his selection are doubly vindicated by his loss. It is also in this light that for Al-Agha, defeat is nothing but bitter, especially that some of the most violent clashes which occurred during the elections took place in his constituency of Khan Younis, a trouble spot that delayed for two days the announcement of the results. His nomination, it seemed, was a test to see how far the PNA will go to put one of its own into office.

The result was a blow. After counts and recounts, the figures released on Monday evening revealed that he had garnered 600 votes less than the lowest winner among the eight Khan Younis candidates.

Even though he may have lost the bid for a ministerial post, however, Al-Agha has not lost Arafat's sympathy yet. On Monday afternoon, an over-worked, pressed Arafat made a point of personally going to Al-Agha's home in Khan Younis to confront him.

Militant of the camps

Marwan Barghouti
(Winner — Ramallah)

IT MAY be Ramadan, but cigarettes are the order of the day for successful Fatah candidate Marwan Barghouti. Dressed in jeans and a leather jacket, sitting in a room jam-packed with young Fatah activists, Marwan personified the Fatah of the camps and the prisons. "We are a national movement, but we are not united. There are differences regarding how to pursue the struggle," he said.

It is clear to which camp Barghouti belongs. As secretary of Fatah's council in the West Bank, the 37-year-old Barghouti spent six years in prison before being deported in 1987 and spending seven years in exile.

In the new council, Barghouti will take his seat alongside the PLO's Tunis old guard and President Arafat's new-found allies from the rich and mercantile classes. But it will not be a comfortable coalition. Local Fatah activists were less-than-pleased that their choices were overturned. Some of them, such as Salih Ta'mi in Bethlehem and Yousef Khader in Nablus, chose to run, and won as independents.

It is more likely that most of them will be elicited back into the fold. But the fault-lines within Fatah will deepen. Fatah, in its new role as a ruling party, will have to formulate economic and social programmes — a task it has so far avoided. As a result, said Barghouti, new blocs are bound to emerge.

With one eye on the election results, he noted dryly: "We have more opposition from within Fatah than from outside."

Chameleon blues

Emad Al-Falouqi
(Loser — North Gaza)

ALTHOUGH Emad Al-Falouqi was, until the last few minutes of the elections, apparently a strong contender, his defeat did not knock him entirely out of the newly-elected legislative council. In the same building that will house the new council is an office for the director of the National Dialogue Bureau, a post specially tailored for Al-Falouqi by Arafat as a reward for breaking ranks with Hamas and embracing the PNA.

But Al-Falouqi's defeat, however, may not simply be a result of being blacklisted by Hamas. In fact, many Fatah members opposed his candidacy, but in the end had to bow to Arafat's decisions. They, however, did not bow so far as to give six of its well-known supporters, who ran as independents, elected.

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A cosy new office supplied by Arafat will not necessarily be the end of Al-Falouqi's woes. As the winner, and the leader of the elections, he was becoming a clear target. Al-Falouqi at first appeared to belong in the former category. With the prospect of victory on the horizon, he attempted to pitch the rift with Hamas by issuing statements to the effect that he would promote the Hamas line within the new council. His defeat, however, now entails the formulation of a new plan of action. Al-Falouqi was one of the founders of Hamas' military wing.

dr. J. S. S.

Secret encounters

Hamas' campaign seems to have paid off, and the self-rule council will share its power with independent Islamists. Samia Nikrumah reports from Gaza City

The newly-elected Palestinian self-rule council is dominated by President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement and its sympathizers. But while the election result indicates that Arafat has consolidated his power, it does not necessarily reflect the diminished popularity of the opponents of the Oslo agreements.

Leading independents in the legislature include not only veteran opposition figures like Haidar Abdel-Shafi, former chief negotiator and leader of the Democracy Building Movement; and independent candidates with an Islamic background who are affiliated to Fatah. The list of successful candidates also includes those close to the Islamic movement, Hamas. All these figures are expected to have a share in power, and they could present a challenge to Arafat's authority in the council.

In Gaza, it was Hamas which presented the main challenge, giving a clear demonstration of its influence. To a large extent, the candidates supported by the Islamist organisation succeeded. "Under different circumstances with the full participation of Hamas in the elections, the council would have looked very different", commented a Hamas member; one of the former deportees to South Lebanon's Marj Al-Zuhur, who is now living in Gaza.

Hamas may have officially boycotted the elections, but it did participate in electoral politics, and with a measure of success too. In Gaza City alone, which remains a Hamas stronghold, more than half the 12 allotted council seats were won by candidates backed by Hamas supporters. These include three independent Islamists: Moussa Al-Zoubi, Youssef Al-Shanti and Wadih Yaqubi, and three Fatah candidates.

Nevertheless, the credit does not all go to Hamas. Mahmoud Zaher, Hamas' spokesman in Gaza, admitted that the success of independents was also partly due to the nature of the Gazan society. Very often the links are not political. Al-Zoubi, one of the successful Islamist candidates, is Zaher's cousin. "In Gaza, we do not live in caffs. As we talk, Al-Zoubi is here visiting."

Zaher said that Hamas had stuck to its official line of boycotting the elections, but in compliance with the Cairo agreement between Hamas and the PLO, Hamas did not prevent voters from exercising their democratic rights. "We did not interfere. People were free to vote and they voted according to their convictions. Admittedly, many candidates had an Islamic background, but they are certainly not linked to Hamas in any political sense."

Another contributing factor to independents' success was the division within Fatah ranks. Zaher claimed that although final results were considered in favour of Fatah, "the reality was that candidates on Arafat's official list failed in many instances and were beaten by other Fatah candidates running as independents. People did not stick to the official list."

But Zaher also conceded that Hamas supporters had participated in the voting and supported independent candidates and even members of Fatah who were known to have Islamist tendencies.

It has also been reported that Hamas supporters actually spread word around just a day before the elections, instructing their followers to vote for their chosen candidates.

Their underground campaign was more intense than

during the years when we were under direct Israeli occupation," commented a Palestinian journalist working in Gaza. "Take Rafah, my home town, as an example. One Islamist affiliated to Al-Takfir Wal-Hijra group won. No one had heard of him before. Only Hamas could have masterminded this plot."

An unsuccessful candidate from the coastal camp in Gaza City, Samir Al-Nouri, said he had been backed by both Fatah and Hamas supporters. The camp had 18,000 registered voters out of 56,000 residents and boasts an equally large following for Hamas and Fatah. According to Al-Nouri, electoral law obliged him to resign from his job as a primary school teacher before he could join the election race. "My main support came from the camps, and the campaign did not cost more than US\$700," he said. "But some voters were torn between choosing a younger street activist and a Western-educated, articulate candidate who could argue our case internationally."

Significant factors in voting choice across the political spectrum seemed to be the background of the candidate, his contribution to the Palestinian cause and a record free of collaboration with Israel. These considerations seemed to offset pressures from political organisations, as demonstrated by the defeat of a Gaza candidate, Zakaria Al-Agha who was the former Palestinian Authority housing minister. However, Zaher pointed out that the importance of family and clan ties could not be overlooked. They were, he said, a major factor behind the high turnout, as members of each major Gaza family mobilised support behind their candidate.

Commenting on Hamas's strategy after the elections, Zaher maintained that the movement's position remained unchanged. Hamas had not participated, he said, because the elections were part and parcel of the Oslo concessions, and any legislation by the new council would be connected with Oslo. He reiterated Hamas' intention of participating in further elections that are not linked to the Oslo agreements, such as the forthcoming municipal elections.

"In the final analysis it is Fatah that will draw the full picture. The independents can only mar or beautify that picture," commented Zaher. "When the people discover that this council cannot pass a single piece of legislation without Israel's approval, they will recognise how far we actually are from our goal of establishing an independent state. States are not made through elections. Elections are made to determine the will of people."

The new council faces another predicament. Some results were not yet confirmed three days after the elections. There is a growing feeling in Gaza, even among Fatah sympathisers, that a game of musical chairs took place during the later stage of counting. The fortunes of some candidates fell and rose overnight, and no final results were declared by Tuesday. "The winners of yesterday are today's losers. Literally," commented the former Marj Al-Zuhur deportee. "How can you explain that a ballot box which is supposed to take only 7,000 votes has 10,000, especially if these incidents happen after the international observers left the scene? The credibility of the Elections Commission is at stake now."

Additional reporting by Khaled Dawoud



Surrounded by supporters holding the Palestinian flag, Yasser Arafat's spokesman, Marwan Karanfani waves in Gaza city last Monday after he was a seat in the 88-member self-rule council [photo: AFP]

Group of 10 slams poll

The Damascus-based Palestinian opposition groups, known as the Group of 10, said the first Palestinian elections held on Saturday were marked by irregularities. They accused PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction of forcing voters to polling stations to show the outside world that they held the most supporters.

Nayef Hawatmeh, leader of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the election results announced on Monday "were decided in advance in order to strengthen Arafat's individual rule and to establish an elected council whose main mission would be the implementation of the unjust Oslo agreements".

He added that the newly-elected council would also be forced to meet Israeli demands to abolish clauses in the original PLO National Charter which call for the liberation of all Palestinian lands, and which Israel interprets as calling for its destruction.

Damascus-based Palestinian opposition groups predict that public support for the newly-elected council will waver away. Atef Sakr reports from the Syrian capital

Hawatmeh affirmed that the newly-elected council did not represent all Palestinians, especially the four million living in exile who were not allowed to vote. He also noted the irregularities that marked the elections in several constituencies in Gaza in favour of some Fatah candidates.

Hawatmeh particularly criticised election proceedings in Jerusalem where Palestinian voters were intimidated by the Israeli authorities and threatened that their residence permits in the holy city would be cancelled. "The way elections were organised gave voters only one choice: Fatah candidates," Hawatmeh said.

Secretary-General of the Damascus-based Jihad organisation, Ramadan Abdallah Shalah, who recently took over the group's leadership after the Israelis assassinated his predecessor, Fathi Al-Shakib, said the Palestinian elections "added nothing new to the Palestinian struggle and were not different from any previous municipal elections held in the occupied territories under Israeli control."

"It is not important just to have an elected council. We want one with the power to take decisions in favour of the Palestinian people and to serve their interests. That is not the case with the present council which is a result of the Oslo agreements."

Shalah accused Arafat's Fatah of "blackmailing voters and spreading rumours that those who do not turn out to cast their ballot would not receive any of the services offered by

the authority. For such reasons, the turnout was high and not because of support for the Oslo agreement, which mainly aimed to guarantee Israel's security."

Maher Al-Taher, spokesman of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), led by George Habash, said his group boycotted the elections because they did not encompass all Palestinians, "and we are still calling for general elections including all Palestinians."

He expected that popular support for the newly-elected council would waver when the people discover that its powers were limited.

"The new council will be asked to offer important concessions on issues of final negotiations with Israel like Jerusalem refugees and the removal of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza," Al-Taher said. "We want a council whose frame of reference would be the Palestinian people and not the Israeli government", he added.

Vote-less Palestinians in the diaspora, living in cities, towns and refugee camps throughout the Middle East, voiced mixed feelings towards the historic elections

Poll view across the river

Just after elections, Caroline Faraj in Amman sounds out the hopeful voice of Palestinians living across the River Jordan

Palestinians living in Jordan were excited about last Saturday's elections across the Jordan River, even though many were unsure whether or not the elected body would be able to fulfil their dreams.

It was clear that Palestinians who came to Jordan after 1948 and became Jordanian citizens, felt neutral towards the elections. One explained, "We are enjoying our citizenship rights in Jordan while we have nothing left in Palestine but good old memories."

Most of the 1967 Palestinian refugees who live in camps were very interested in the voting results, even though most expressed an unwillingness to return to their homeland. "I would love to go and visit our family, but life is difficult there and it is not easy to start from scratch," said a Palestinian engineer.

"The future is not clear yet, and we have to be realistic," he added.

Others, who are facing economic difficulties in their adopted country, long to return to Palestine. "It is our right to vote for our representatives, exactly like the lucky Palestinians who returned back to their homes-

land," said Hassan, a 31-year-old living in Baqa, Jordan's largest refugee camp with more than 100,000 people.

"It's such a great feeling to see that our brothers and sisters in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are able, for the first time in 27 years, to exercise their political rights. This places them well on the road to building democratic institutions and their own state," asserted Hala Salem, 45, a Palestinian businessman.

A Palestinian observer in Jordan, Ahmed Mahmoud, said that after years of occupation, deprivation and dispossession, Palestinians now have the chance to start anew. However, he added, "The recent detention of journalists and human rights activists and the manner in which they were treated, does not sugar well for the Palestinians' quest for freedom."

"We are hopeful that the new Palestinian council, the representative body of real Palestinian aspirations, will ad-

dress all issues with enlightenment and fairness," ventured Amjad Qurrash, a Palestinian banker.

"It is true that the real task that awaits the council and its president is to complete the liberation of all the Palestinian lands including Jerusalem, while the other goal, that of liberating the people themselves, is an important and challenging," said one Palestinian observer.

"One fact the two aims go hand in hand. Palestine, land and people, has been waiting for this moment, and it is now the responsibility of the Palestinian elected representatives to liberate both in order to build a free and democratic state," he added.

Mohamed Kawash, a Palestinian writer, commented that the voting constitutes the first step towards creating a democratic state and paves the ground for Palestinian independence. He said that soon after the elections, the ruling Palestinian entity should im-

'Next time, we'll vote'

Faiza Rady reports from Egypt's sole Palestinian refugee camp, where the residents were rejoicing at Fatah's election victory

"This is a God-forsaken place. We have been stranded here and forgotten by you media people. Why did you ever bother to come here?" asked Abu Rashed, a 50-year-old resident of Camp David, the only Palestinian refugee camp in Egypt. Despite the man's harsh words, the camp donned a festive and lively appearance. On the first day of the holy month of Ramadan, the main street was decked out with multi-coloured streamers and brightly-lit lanterns, and people busily shopped for the evening meal that breaks the dawn-to-dusk fast. Unlike in the Syrian, Jordanian and Lebanese camps where people had demonstrated against a peace agreement that omitted their repatriation and Palestinian elections that excluded them, there were no such signs of protest in "Canada".

In Abu Hossam's grocery store a group of men excitedly discussed the election, rejoicing at Yasser Arafat's victory. "Abu Ammar will lead us to victory," said one man. "I always knew we could count on the old man. Look at what he has accomplished. For the first time in history, we can vote for our own representatives in Palestine," he added. Qalab believes the Palestinians will learn from their mistakes and therefore the next elections will be better organised.

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As I left the shop with Abu Rashed, he described the general euphoria. "Most of us here support Fatah. We have to be realistic and acknowledge that access to even the tiniest parcel of Palestinian land represents an accomplishment. The rest will be settled in the upcoming negotiations. We trust our leadership. What do the rejectionists want? Do they prefer the 'no war no peace situation' we have lived with for decades?"

Unlike other diaspora Palestinians, the population of Camp Canada had their repatriation settled in the Camp David accords. Situated on the Egyptian-Israeli border, the camp was built on Egyptian land in the early seventies.

At the time, Ariel Sharon — the general who was to gain notoriety during the 1982 Israeli invasion as the infamous "butcher of Lebanon" — tried to break the Palestinian resistance in Gaza. To gain easy access to the camp that were at the forefront of the struggle against the occupation, he proceeded to raze the densely populated housing settlements and their surrounding narrow lanes — which had provided an escape route for the fida'iyin. As a result, thousands were left homeless and pushed south to settle on the then occupied Egyptian border area.

When Sinai was returned to Egypt in April 1982, a special provision of the Camp

David agreements prescribed the eventual resettlement of the 5,000 Camp Canada residents in Gaza and the restitution of the camp's grounds to its original Egyptian owners.

In the meantime, the refugees suffered considerable hardship. "Since Camp David, we have been living on borrowed time," said Abu Rashed. "As of '82, we were promised repatriation and yet it was only in 1990 that some people were sent back to Palestine — only 35 out of the camp's 500 families. The process is slow and painful: it's like a dripping tap. Some people manage to get the permits from the Israelis and the allotted \$12,000 repatriation costs, and the rest just sit around and wait. Look at me, I can't plan anything. I don't want to invest in building or even regular maintenance of my house because I need every penny I can spare to build my new house in Gaza. I can't marry off my children because I don't know what the future holds for me or them."

Yet, the camp inhabitants are now hopeful that the Palestinian National Authority will manage to expedite their resettlement. "God willing, we will all return by the end of the year," commented Abu Hossam. "In this sense, the elections concern us and have a direct impact on our lives. The next time around, we also will vote in our homeland — Palestine."

Divided hearts

Hope and despair fought in the hearts of Palestinians living in Lebanon as their brethren in the self-rule areas went to the polls, writes Zeina Khodr from Beirut

The first ever Palestinian elections, held in the self-rule areas of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to elect a president and an assembly, evoked mixed reactions among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Supporters of the newly-elected Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat hailed the elections, while opposition groups scorned the event.

Partially-successful strikes were staged in 17 out of the 12 refugee camps in Lebanon on election day to express opposition, but there were none of the demonstrations or fire-burnings usually witnessed in protest strikes. In the southern city of Tyre, the Rashedieh Camp, home to 18,000 and controlled by Arafat's supporters, did not observe the strike. Indeed there was a mood of jubilation, with posters of Arafat everywhere.

Sultan Abu Amin, head of Arafat's Fatah organisation in Lebanon, who is based in Rashedieh, described the election as a historic event and a turning point for the Palestinian people. "This is the first time general elections have been held," he said, adding that the voting had been free and democratic, with no disturbances.

"It is an unprecedented event in the history of the Palestinian people, with leaders being popularly elected instead of appointed", commented Maher Shabata, head of Fatah in Ain Al-Hilweh in Sidon, Lebanon's biggest camp, housing some 75,000 people.

"All Palestinians were happy", he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The high turnout of voters shows how much support Arafat and his peace moves have on the ground. The elections have given Arafat legitimacy and democratic credentials."

According to Shabata, the Palestinian opposition lacks a unified political agenda. "They do nothing but talk", he said. He added that the strike in the camps did not have the consent of camp residents. "The opposition groups which called for the strike had to coerce the people to close down their shops. They could not muster enough support to make the strike effective."

However, opposition factions have criticised the elections on the grounds that the results cannot claim to be representative of the Palestinian people since the millions of Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan were excluded.

The estimated 400,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, who are living in dire conditions, have differing views on the PLO-Israel peace agreements. Those who oppose the peace process believe the deals offer them little chance of ever returning to their homeland since they believe the PLO has neglected United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194, which calls for Palestinians' right to return to their homes in northern Israel.

Colonel Mustafa Mukdad, leader of a Fatah splinter group in Ain Al-Hilweh, told the *Weekly* that the elections were not legitimate since they were held under Israeli occupation.

Neither, he added, would they result in the four million Palestinians in exile being allowed to return home. "The Oslo agreement stipulates that every 5,000 Palestinians will be allowed to return home. This means it will take 160 years before the 1967 refugees will be repatriated. After that, they will discuss the fate of the 1948 refugees."

The 400,000 figure is disputed by the various factions. Pro-Arafat officials say the number is an exaggeration, and that there are no more than 200,000 Palestinians in Lebanon. Mukdad added that the Palestinians believe in democracy. "In this camp, which is a gun forest, there is more democracy than in the United States. There are many factions which share different opinions. But we all meet constantly."

It is worth noting Mukdad had arranged the *Weekly's* interview with Shabata. He even sent his bodyguard to help this correspondent locate Shabata's office in the camp which is made up of a maze of alleys and streets.

Most of the Palestinians in Lebanon are 1948 refugees or their descendants. A 70-year-old Palestinian at the Sabra Camp in Beirut told the *Weekly* that Arafat has worked for his people but "he has done nothing for me and the other 1948 refugees. I do not think I will ever be able to go back to my country." Another 75-year-old woman was quick to slam Arafat and his policies. "Nobody recognises the 1948 refugees anymore. Our fate is known. It seems we will through armed resistance."

I have a brother in Gaza. He told me that he can send me the documents needed to return to the Gaza Strip but I refused," a 45-year-old father of nine in Shatila said. "Why should I go back? People are dying of hunger there. My brother told me that the authorities gave him US \$500 to vote." Mukdad noted that the amount of money spent for the polls would have rebuilt the infrastructure in the self-rule areas.

Avrasya's ordeal

At eight o'clock on Tuesday morning, the Turkish vessel Avrasya entered the harbour of the Crimean port of Sochi after a week-long ordeal. Aboard were 109 passengers, including 92 Russians, eight Ukrainians, seven Georgians and a couple of Kirghiz nationals. Avrasya had been hijacked in the Turkish port of Trabzon on Tuesday 16 January.

The original 255 hostages aboard the ferry were released unharmed when the pro-Chechen kidnappers tossed their weapons overboard and surrendered at the northern entrance of the Bosphorus, near the Turkish metropolis of Istanbul. The Turkish and other non-Russian passengers disembarked while the Russia-bound passengers went on to Sochi.

Eight million of Turkey's 70 million people are of Caucasian origin and there is a Chechen community of about 25,000 in Turkey. Turks of Caucasian descent, together with the vast majority of their compatriots, are overwhelmingly supportive of the Chechen cause — and especially so since Russian troops invaded Chechnya in December 1994. Over 30,000 Chechens have been lost since the eruption of civil war in the Caucasian mountain stronghold.

President Boris Yeltsin created a dangerous precedent when he ordered the Russian armed forces into the break-away republic. Ordinarily one would expect their duty to be securing the territorial integrity of the state from foreign invasions, rather than unleashing their full weight on settling domestic scores. What is rather embarrassing for the Russians is that the right of the Russian army was de-

The Turkish vessel Avrasya docked in the Crimean port of Sochi on Tuesday morning with long-suffering Russian hostages aboard. **Abdel-Malek Khalil** from Moscow tells the unfortunate ferry's tale

ployed against a mere 400 Chechen warriors with very little to show for themselves. What would the situation be now had the Russians faced an army composed of several thousand troops? Russia's new foreign minister, Yevgeny Primakov, described his country as a "super-power" earlier in the week, but it would be difficult to justify his claim.

The escape of the Chechen warrior Salman Radoyev from the Russian army's siege of the captured village of Pervomaiskaya in Dagestan is a testament to the Russians' predicament. What makes matters worse is that Radoyev took with him Russian hostages and outmanoeuvred five Russian generals under the command of General Parsons and General Kolikov, both of whom had been decorated with the Marshal Star military award by President Yeltsin a few days before.

Yeltsin's refusal to listen to the warnings of General Lebed, the former head of the Russian 14th army, was a serious error. Pervomaiskaya was a disgrace to Russia and a blot on the honour of Boris Yeltsin, Grigori Yavlinski,

leader of the liberal reform Yabloko bloc, told CNN reporters recently.

The notion is being reinforced that President Yeltsin does not settle disputes by negotiation, but resorts to the use of force. Yeltsin's threat to raze the Dagestani village of Pervomaiskaya is a grim reminder of his order in October 1993 to bombard the Russian parliament building with artillery.

The current situation does not augur well for the stability of the Russian Federation, with its diverse array of peoples. Murtada Rahimov, president of the Bashkir autonomous republic in the Russian Federation, is one of those who has expressed his fears for the future of the union.

Boris Yeltsin has been receiving growing criticism for granting executive and legislative powers to the loyal Russian communities of Cossacks. The Cossacks are known historically for their zeal in defending the czars of Russia and for their ferocious suppression of attacks on imperial territory by other peoples. Hailing from the south of Russia, they have declared their willingness to help Yeltsin "discipline" the Chechen rebels.

Numerous prominent figures and organisations in Russia have voiced their disapproval of the president's heavy-handed tactics in the Chechen crisis. Among them are Ramadan Abdalatifov, deputy president of the Russian Federal Council and a leading Dagestani personality; Alexei II, patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Union of the Muslims of Russia. But President Yeltsin has ignored the cautionary advice of all them.

Russia at the crossroads

Recently, Russia has been in the limelight for all the wrong reasons. The Russian ambassador to Cairo, Vladimir Goudev, gave an exclusive interview to *Iraqi News* explaining the Russian point of view on issues relating to the ongoing Chechen crisis. Below are excerpts from the interview.

Chechen rebel leader Dzhokhar Dudayev: "He has resorted to thwarting the peace process in Chechnya and disrupting the internal dialogue between the Chechens. He has lost the support of most sections of the Chechen people and began to rely on small military groups and terrorist gangs."

"These groups, under the leadership of one of Dudayev's relatives, entered Dagestan, a Muslim republic in the Russian Federation which borders Chechnya, and took residents of a village [Pervomaiskaya] hostage. The incident has dealt a heavy blow to the sentiments of Dagestanis, since the republic gave asylum to Chechen refugees during the military operations in Chechnya."

The hostage crisis: "This terrorist act is unprecedented in its scale. The reasons behind it are the same as those behind terrorist acts in other places such as Afghanistan and Egypt, where hundreds have been victims. We believe that Russia, Egypt, Algeria and other countries which are prone to such attacks are all in the same boat."

"The priority must undoubtedly be to save the hostages. Sometimes, however, there is a pressing need to use military measures."

Will Russia resort to a military solution to this crisis? "We picked up a signal sent by Dudayev to his son-in-law [who led the raid into Dagestan] by wire, telling him to start killing the hostages. It is certainly not easy to take decisions in these difficult circumstances when lives are at risk."

There are some forces in Russia which support the use of military force to solve such conflicts, but Russian public opinion tends towards the use of firm measures aimed at preventing such acts occurring in the first place. The decision which the Russian leadership has taken is in step with the will of Russian society."

Rights at war

Wars during the nineties have been increasingly ethnic and religious in character. **Rachad Antonius** explains how civilians have become targets rather than accidental victims of armed conflict

Thanks to the formidable impulse experienced by the human rights movement in the last few years, it is much easier now to obtain information about human rights violations in different parts of the world. The yearly reports issued by the various human rights monitoring groups are an important tool of knowledge, as they give a comprehensive view of the situation.

The latest report of Human Rights Watch, for instance, released last December, is a good example as it is issued by one of the most credible and respected human rights organisations. The report documents human rights violations across the world, country by country, and notes also the response — or lack of response — of the international community (the UN and the leading powers) to these situations. Some important issues arise from this report and from others by similar organisations. Among them is the issue of war and armed conflicts.

The international community codified the rules that must be followed during wars in the four Geneva conventions of 1949 and in the two additional protocols of 1977. The conventions deal with the rights of the wounded, the sick, the shipwrecked and prisoners of war. The Fourth Geneva Convention addresses the rights of the civilian populations. The idea behind these conventions is that, even in time of war, enemies must be treated with a minimum of human decency; the set of rules defining that minimum constitute the "international humanitarian law".

Since the fall of the Berlin wall, the nature of most wars has changed, and an increasing number of violent confrontations seem to be "ethnic-religious" in character. In an ethno-religious war, a political group, defining itself in ethnic or religious terms and led by an ideology of exclusion, decides to occupy the space where another group lives or to expel it from previously shared areas.

In an ethno-religious war, the civilians are not accidental victims who find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time; they are the targets *par excellence*. In this context, it is expected that the international humanitarian law will not be respected; the information available on human rights violations unfortunately confirms that negative expectation. Indeed, we see today that in Rwanda, Burundi, Bosnia, Sudan and many republics of the former Soviet Union conflicts take the forms of ethno-religious wars. The conflict is most bloody when none of the warring parties is able to impose its will on the other easily, and in this case atrocities are generally committed against the civilian populations. Thus, the study of the state of human rights in these situations, with a view to intervention, is a high priority on the agenda of human rights organisations.

The increase in the number of confrontations of this type is a challenge for the international community. Consequently, it has adopted principles of "collective solidarity", which make it imperative to intervene to protect civilian populations which are under threat. The Geneva conventions are not a sufficient tool anymore, as they assume that the conflicting parties are responsible states which will comply with international law. When the conflicting parties are led by warlords, the Geneva conventions clearly do not operate.

The international community has recognised that, given its moral obligation to intervene, it must devise other mechanisms. The human rights organisations have been pressing to establish international tribunals to judge the perpetrators of war crimes and of crimes against humanity. Indeed, two such commissions have been established for Bosnia and for Rwanda.

Having said that, we should mention that these principles of international legality are used very selectively, a situation which undermines them. Nevertheless, the establishment of precedents and the effort to extend the principles to all circumstances are a step in the right direction.

Ethno-religious conflict is not always between social groups which are in a more or less symmetric situation. In some places, the conflict is between a group that feels discriminated against because of its minority status and the state in which it lives. In this situation, political parties emerge among the discriminated against group, which demands equal rights or some kind of autonomy or even outright secession from the state. These kinds of conflicts have also been on the increase, as more people refuse to be treated as second-class citizens.

The tendency worldwide has been to struggle for the establishment of new states that are ethnically defined. This has usually triggered brutal reactions from the state to represent such demands. This kind of situation has occurred in Chechnya, Kurdistan, Tibet, East Timor, Albania, India, Southern Sudan, Ethiopia, Iraq and many other places in the world. In some cases it has led to viable states that are internationally recognised, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh.

These situations are delicate for several reasons. One is that the states in question always claim that the conflict is an internal matter and that the international community has no business in it. The second reason is that the weak parties in these situations are liable to be manipulated easily by more powerful neighbours or by international powers. For instance, Iraqi Kurds used to be supported by Iran and Iranian Kurds by Iraq, each of these two states posing as the champion of the other's minority while repressing their own in a rather brutal way. The United States has been supporting struggles for independence only when the price would be paid by enemies. Friendly states guilty of repressing their minorities usually get away with it, or even get active support carrying out the repression.

All these situations are clearly a concern to human rights organisations, as repressive states are usually guilty of crimes against humanity in their attempt to repress the given minority. Human rights organisations have pleaded for economic sanctions against states which violate human rights in this way or in others. They have noted that political leaders play a disturbingly small role in bringing to trial those responsible for such crimes, preferring to let trade and investment considerations prevail over foreign policy.

Although economic pressures can be useful to get states to comply with the principles of international humanitarian law, we must note again that they are used very selectively, which undermines their credibility: a principle is no more a principle if it is used selectively.

In response to these situations, an ideology of citizenship must be promoted which aims at the creation of a common civic space in multi-ethnic or multi-religious societies. In this vision, citizens are not defined first of all by their religious or ethnic identity, but by the fact that they are citizens in a state that does not discriminate between them on that basis. This ideology is more likely to promote respect for the basic human rights of all citizens in a state. It is, however, very far from drawing large support, especially in developing nations.

In the previous examples, aggressors and victims felt they belonged to different groups, essentially defined by ethnicity. But a large number of violations are perpetrated by governments against their own people, particularly — but not exclusively — in the Third World. This, however, is the subject of another discussion.



ETHNIC minorities protest the deadliest anti-immigrant attack in Germany since World War II. Fire raced through a building housing immigrants and asylum seekers in the German port city of Lubeck last Thursday. The four-storey building housed Africans and Arabs, including Angolan, Zairian, Syrian and Lebanese nationals — all newcomers to Germany. At least 10 people including a child died. Over 20 others were seriously injured. Police detained three German neo-Nazis, but later released them for lack of evidence. Then a Lebanese national was arrested. Police suspect that the incident was a neo-Nazi arson attack and the search for the culprits still goes on. (photo: AP)

Cleaving to Cold War legacies

Politically the Horn of Africa appears to be cleaving to Cold War legacies even though it is clear that only one superpower now provides the best protection against the region's numerous traditional rivalries and divided loyalties. American aid makes Washington an effective moral engine for the 1990s. Without strong American support, the indignation of Sudan's neighbours would not take them very far in their disputes with Khartoum. It is in this context that Madeleine Albright, the US ambassador to the United Nations, is on an African tour as part of a fact-finding mission for US President Bill Clinton and the UN Security Council. Albright, who stopped over in the trouble spots of Liberia, Angola, Rwanda and Burundi, skipped Sudan altogether.

In Cairo at a meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, she stressed that she agreed with the recent communiqué issued by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) which urged the Sudanese government to take the necessary measures to look for, locate and extradite the three suspects in the attempted assassination of President Hosni Mubarak in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, last June. The communiqué was released after the fifth ordinary session of the central organ of the OAU mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution, which took place in Addis Ababa on 18-19 December 1995.

Ethiopia's ambassador to Egypt, Tshome Toga Chamaa, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Sudan was resorting to its old "diversionary tactics" and that it had "lodged a protest with the UN Security Council on 12 January against Ethiopia, claiming that aggression had been committed against its territory by Ethiopia". Chamaa proceeded to explain, "If the Sudanese authorities choose to engage in provocative activities along the common borders between Ethiopia and Sudan, in the belief that this will divert the attention of Ethiopia from pursuing the charges, then Khartoum is mistaken."

Patience with Khartoum's political antics appears to be running out among Sudan's neighbours. In an unprecedented attack on Khartoum, Addis Ababa accused Sudan of sheltering Egyptians and Sudanese suspected of involvement in the Addis Ababa assassination attempt. The five Non-Aligned Nations represented at the UN Security Council — including Egypt — have urged Sudan to comply with requests to extradite the suspects. The president of the UN Security Council, Sir John Weston of Britain, insisted that Khartoum must take the question of the extradition of the suspects more seriously. He brushed aside Khartoum's request that the Security Council meet to discuss alleged cross-border incursions into the eastern Sudanese province of Al-Ghaderia by Ethiopia's armed forces. Weston maintained that the Security Council was studying Khartoum's claims and relying on OAU and UN Secretariat reports.

Sudan's neighbours realise that the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) — or rather its armed wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) — has lost considerable ground in the battlefields of Southern Sudan since the 1989 coup d'état that brought Lieutenant-General Omar Hassan Al-Bashir to power. The SPLA lost towns but held on to the countryside. The SPLA is not as united as it used to be, but it is not irreversibly divided either. In any case, Sudan's neighbours so far have decided to provide the kind of military and logistical support that Addis Ababa gave the SPLA during the regime of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. Ethiopia under the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is no exception.

Soon after the EPRDF came to power, relations between Addis Ababa and Khartoum dramatically improved. The new Ethiopian government stopped the

A winner-take-all dynamic is at work in the Horn of Africa and Sudan most certainly looks like a loser. And with good reason, for Washington appears to be the winner, writes Gamal Nkrumah

SPLA from using Ethiopian territory as a staging post for attacks inside Sudan. The friendship was short-lived, however, as Sudan stepped up its support for Ethiopian Islamist groups.

The paradox is that Sudan's earlier rapprochement with post-Mengistu Ethiopia pulled against long-standing hostilities between the two countries. Historically, Khartoum and Addis Ababa have invariably been at odds. When Mengistu's Sudan was pro-Western, former President Gaafar Numeiri's Sudan was pro-Western. Today the tables are turned. The Islamists-oriented Sudan — under the spiritual guidance of the National Islamic Front's (NIF) head, Hassan Al-Turabi — is vociferously anti-Western. EPRDF-led Ethiopia is decidedly pro-Western; it is democratising its political structures and deregulating its economy.

The EPRDF, the governing coalition, last May organised Ethiopia's first multi-party general elections in its 3,000-year recorded history. The EPRDF is made up of four closely aligned parties representing the country's major ethnic groups: the Tigray People's Liberation Front, the Oromo People's

Democratic Organisation, the Amhara National Democratic Movement and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front.

They were all opposed to the Marxist-oriented military regime of Mengistu, who fled the country to Zimbabwe in May 1991. Ever since, the US has emerged as the undisputed broker of Ethiopia's fortunes. Washington gets its seal of approval on the electoral process despite its acknowledgement of a few isolated irregularities. The point is that Ethiopia is precisely what Washington wishes to be.

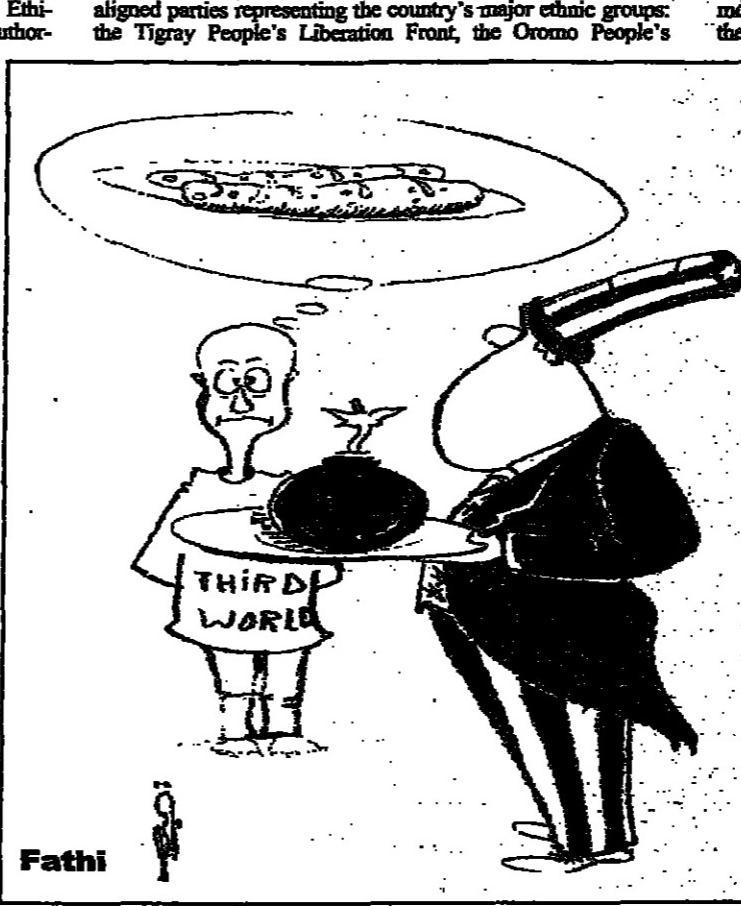
Washington likewise holds sway in the breakaway former Ethiopian province of Eritrea which gained its independence from Ethiopia in April 1993. The US provides over 30 per cent of Eritrea's food aid. Eritrea is a country where two-thirds of the population of three million rely on foreign food aid for sustenance. Washington also promised Eritrea \$1.5 million to liberalise and privatise its state-controlled economy and an additional \$2.1 million to strengthen the democratic institutions of Africa's newest nation. Ethiopia, always the driving force of the Horn of Africa, is equally dependent on American food aid. With a population of 50 million and a per capita income of less than \$150 a year, Ethiopia received \$5.5 million in US food aid in 1995.

As serious regional debate is stymied by Sudanese intransigence, especially on defence and security issues, the chances of Khartoum becoming embroiled in further debacles with its neighbours only increase. Sudan's neighbours are not finding it easy to propel Khartoum forward into a new phase where its moral centre does not gravitate towards extremism. Far from the common thread being that Sudan's neighbours pose a threat to its political stability, the common thread is that Sudan's neighbours — Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda — have all independently come to the conclusion that Khartoum should be bracketed with terrorism. In each country, Khartoum is seen as having a hand in the breakdown of law and order.

Today, Sudan represents the failure of post-independence Africa to accommodate racial and religious diversity, the recourse to military means to conceal political chaos and national disunity and the subsequent breakdown of economic and political infrastructures and social institutions. Ethiopia, on the other hand, represents a forward-looking Africa determined to overcome ethnic repression and onerous internal wars. It has put in place democratic institutions that make civil society workable and correct past mistakes.

The rulers of Sudan have forfeited any regional and international sympathy by their intransigence in dealing with their neighbours. Khartoum is today treated as an international pariah precisely because it cannot even fashion a halfway deal with its neighbours on the question of non-interference in their internal affairs. Nor can Khartoum face implementing even a façade of democracy at home. It is, therefore, hindering the establishment of a *modus vivendi* in the region. It is also obstructing the smooth running of the Inter-Governmental Agency for Drought and Development (IGADD), grouping Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and other Horn of Africa nations.

Khartoum has not publicly rejected revolutionary violence in its not-so-secret campaign to turn its neighbours into like-minded Islamist-oriented states. And in spite of all the denials, Khartoum has not watered down its ideological crusade to Islamise the region. Sudan has yet to offer a tangible confidence-building measure. If the country's neighbours can hope, at least, for some strong international action on Sudan, there may be an easing of Khartoum's obstinacy.



Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

The "agricultural railways" take us deep into that relatively unknown world of the Egyptian countryside where they left an indelible mark on rural culture. Popular songs readily spring to mind, such as the ditty, "On the agricultural line, Oh Lord, I wish to meet my loved one."

These rural trains played a significant part in the social, economic and political life of the Egyptian peasant. They became a major meeting point for the *fellaheen*, rivaling the traditional *maztaba* — a stone bench outside a house — where they would gather to spend the hot summer nights and strengthen village relations. Provincial authorities, encouraged by the central government, actively extended the network of railways to distant towns and hamlets that were inaccessible by water transport or as yet unreached by the major railway lines. The expanding grip of central government in the latter half of the 19th century was coupled with the country's economic transition to a single cash crop — cotton — prompting the establishment of a larger and more rapid transportation system to bring this lucrative produce to the national markets and from there to the international ones.

These aspects of life that revolved around the agricultural railways have never received the scientific study which they deserve. An exploration of *Al-Ahram* of the epoch, on the other hand, has much to reveal about a world that has up to now been largely obscure.

Before proceeding with our investigation into the impact of rural railways during the last decade of the 19th century, we have several observations to make.

Firstly, such railways did already exist in Egypt but they were primarily restricted to the banks of the Nile and the irrigation canals that branched off it. The railways that spanned the narrow irrigation dunes in Beni Suef, Minya, Assiut, Girga and Qena are examples of the small-gauge, rickety transport that was available.

Secondly, since they were constructed to parallel existing waterways, their use was limited. Water transport still predominated and the trains themselves were generally only used to transport small shipments of farm animals and agricultural workers. They were not used to move heavier freight over longer distances, since the energy required to move a single ton over one kilometer cost more than moving four tons over four kilometers by conventional animal-driven carts.

Thirdly, although the transition to capitalist production had begun quite early in the century, the manifestations of progress took some time to emerge. The single major landmark in rural railways occurred in the age of Khedive Sayed (1854-1863), who devoted such attention to rural development that it was described by historians as the "golden age of the *fellaheen*". During this period, the silt and dirt that was dredged from the Mahmoudia Canal

was used to construct a ten metre wide road paralleling the canal upon which a railway was constructed to link the various centres bordering it. It was the first "first class" rural railway, in contrast to the old rickety lines which were classified as "second class," and it would remain the only such railway for some time.

In spite of the major construction works that took place under Khedive Sayed's successor, the Khedive Ismail and during the first years of British occupation which began in 1881, the agricultural railways received little attention. Instead, attention was focused on laying the primary network of railways that was to link the country's major urban centres. It was only after this network was completed that people realised that certain productive agricultural regions had been left out of the scheme, and that rural routes were needed to fill the gaps.

Al-Ahram's Cairo correspondent alerts his readers to this fact. In an article that appeared on 20 October 1890, he writes:

"The region to the north near Al-Sinbalawin and certain regions in the south that are distant from the railways and Nile water conduits are in desperate need of agricultural railway lines to link them to other centres. Cotton which is produced in the areas close to the lines of communications sells for 300 piastres, whereas it sells for only 260 piastres in the more remote areas due to the difficulties and expense involved in transporting it."

At the same time we learn of a petition submitted by the mayors and prominent citizens of the Daqahliya governorate to the Ministry of Public Works requesting the construction of an agricultural branch line between Mit Ghair and Al-Zaqziqu on the grounds that "the cultivators in these parts are in absolute need of such a line because their farms are far away from railway stations."

Not all such petitions were approved. On 2 December 1891, the Assiut councilors met to decide not to construct branch lines. "The project has no significance due to the proximity of the customary land and water transport linking the areas of the directorate," it resolved.

The resolution, however, was rather the exception than the rule. Increasingly, prominent rural personalities and government officials saw the economic and political advantages of constructing agricultural branch lines. The first recorded instance comes from Fayoum. On 10 May 1889, *Al-Ahram* reports that two years previously, the citizens of Fayoum had petitioned for "the construction of an agricultural railway in this directorate in order to facilitate the transportation of their crops" and they further pledged "to donate the necessary land for this purpose free of charge." Close on its heels followed requests from other provinces. The correspondent in Tala describes "the ardent desire" of the people of Al-Menoufia for agricultural branch lines, particularly one

linking Tala with Tukh, "due to its great commercial importance". "Hopefully, they will not have to wait long until their venerable commissioner turns his assiduous attention to this important matter," concludes the writer. The people of Al-Daqahliya had submitted a similar request, and, as *Al-Ahram* reports, "now that the plans have been designed and the expenses calculated, there should be nothing to obstruct commencing work on the project." In Sharqiya, the people expressed their great expectations for a railway construction project that had been approved and the construction of which was already under way. "The time could not be more propitious," writes *Al-Ahram's* correspondent. "The crops that have been planted in winter are just beginning to sprout."

In response to the flood of requests, the Ministry of Public Works began drawing up plans for the new lines. The plans, closely associated with Colonel Moncrieff, the British deputy minister of public works, were outlined in *Al-Ahram*. The first stage would be a trial phase, beginning in the directorates of Al-Daqahliya and Al-Sharqiya. According to the report submitted by Moncrieff, "The wealthy inhabitants shall donate the land necessary for these railways, due to the enormous benefits they will bring to their property and their prosperity. Others will donate portions of their income or their la-

bour toward construction, and the government will allocate the money for the construction of bridges, banks and pipes needed to facilitate the laying of the aforementioned lines." The plans also stipulated penalties against sabotage in order to prevent the *fellaheen* "from drawing water from the pipes or removing soil for the purposes of cultivation in the adjacent lands, as they have done to the dams and embankments that support railway lines." Evidently, too, the project provoked some consternation among landowners who were rebuked by *Al-Ahram* for having "spread exaggerated rumours of ill effects and misrepresented the government's intentions, which are only to bring the greatest benefit and should not give cause to scurrilous rumours."

On 20 October 1890, the *Shura* Council ratified the agricultural railways bill, but not without introducing minor modifications — that the railways "be constructed in areas remote from the major railway stations and waterways". The law marks the birth of the rural branch routes, which from this point on began to spread through considerable stretches of the remote countryside, as is evidenced from *Al-Ahram's* coverage over the subsequent years.

Naturally, Al-Daqahliya and Al-Sharqiya, the forerunners in the field, received their prime share of attention. On 16 September 1890, *Al-Ahram* reports that

seven branch lines would be constructed in these directorates, linking 12 major villages in the Delta in addition to numerous points in between. At the same time, precautions had to be taken to ensure the smooth progress of operations and the maintenance of the sections that had been completed. Authorities issued instructions forbidding the populace from "cultivating crops within a distance of three metres of the lines". If land has been cultivated within the proscribed areas, "the government will not heed the crops nor will their owners have any claim to compensation for any such crops that may be subject to damage."

Regardless of initial objections that may have been voiced, *Al-Ahram* reports, "The people are extremely delighted with the project." The beginnings were auspicious, not just for the inhabitants of Al-Daqahliya and Al-Sharqiya, but for the inhabitants of all the other Egyptian governorates. The people of Fayoum, who had earlier petitioned for extending branch lines, persisted in their requests. Finally, in the summer of 1891, the Ministry of Public Works announced its approval. The only hitch was the tax on each feddan of land through which the proposed railway lines would pass. This would be four piastres, twice that of Al-Daqahliya and Al-Sharqiya. Nevertheless, the people assembled, and two years later, 13 lines were under construction, linking most of the oasis.

In Al-Behira, in response to popular re-

quests, the commissioner succeeded in "obtaining the entire funds necessary for the project within a few months." The same story repeated itself in Al-Qalyubia, Al-Gharbiya, Al-Menoufiya and Qena. So frequent were *Al-Ahram* reports on the subject that its readers must have thought that not a single spot in Egypt remained that had not yet been reached by railroad.

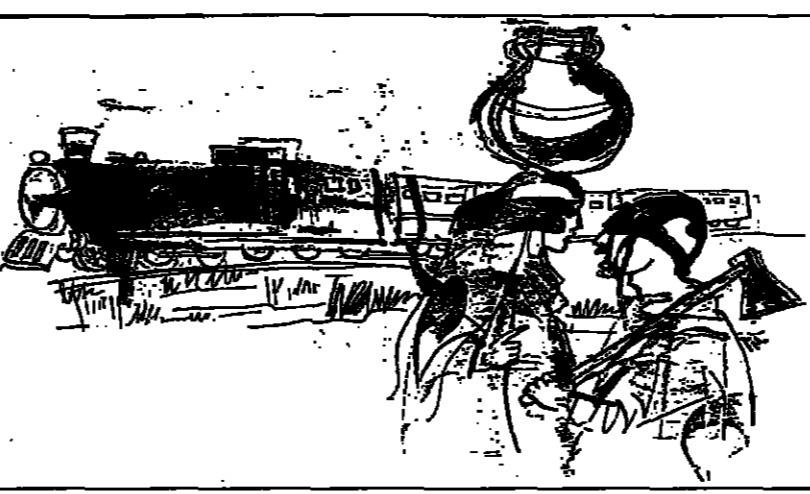
In the middle of 1896, *Al-Ahram* reported rumours to the effect that the Souaris family, Jewish industrialists and owners of the Helwan railroad had obtained the concession to construct agricultural branch lines in Al-Daqahliya and Al-Sharqiya and that a British contractor had applied for a similar concession. That same year, it reported that the Narrow Gauge Railway Company, referred to by the newspaper as the "tramway company," had applied for a concession to build railroads in Al-Behira province. At first the newspaper welcomed this, declaring that "it will bring untold benefit" to the province. Its correspondent in Al-Daqahliya, however, was of a different opinion, an opinion that the newspaper would adopt uniformly with regard to the issue. His view appeared in *Al-Ahram* of 15 October 1896 under the headline, "Lost Rights". The patriotic tenor of the author reflects itself in his defence of the Egyptian *fellaheen*. It is he who has sole claim to the rights of the agricultural railways, because he has paid in

labour for their costs and for the crops the land produces. "No other person has the right to deprive him of his claims, because he bought it with his own money, without a single passer's help from the government. The benefit of these railways, by law and by reason of justice, should go entirely to the *fellaheen*, their sole and rightful owner." Having himself seen a copy of the contract granting the concession to "an English company based in London", he could vouch that he did not see a single condition that favoured the interests of the Egyptian people. Or perhaps, he commented sarcastically, the only condition that could conceivably be considered favourable was the clause stipulating that the right to the concession would revert to the Egyptian government after 70 years. "Congratulations to the children of our children for this great fortune!" he proclaims. Moving to the crux of the issue, he explains, "The *fellaheen*, in accordance with the provisions of the concession, has been totally deprived of any possible benefit the new railways could offer him. He will not be able to transport either his animals, his crops or the members of his family because he will have to pay needless extra expenses in addition to the money that has already come out of his pocket to pay for the construction of these railways." In conclusion, he urges all the other "proud and concerned" newspapers to investigate the reasons behind this forfeit of the *fellaheen's* rights and to join him in protest against the losses that could be sustained by the *fellaheen* and Egyptian agriculture.

It was not long before the people of Al-Gharbiya and Al-Sharqiya backed him up through *Al-Ahram's* correspondents there. In Al-Gharbiya, the people objected to the proposed project on the grounds that "it would disrupt work and harm the crops". They therefore urged the government "to delay the project a little while". In Al-Sharqiya, the attitude was slightly different. There, rather than fighting the onset of private enterprise, people decided to join it. The initiative was taken, needless to say, by the prominent landowners, who, in the beginning of 1898, applied for a license to construct narrow-gauge agricultural branch lines, "in order to facilitate travel and commercial transport." *Al-Ahram* lauded the initiative and urged the government to respond favourably, underscoring its opposition to granting the concessions to foreign enterprise.

Caught between compassion for the *fellaheen* and hopes for progress in rural Egypt, *Al-Ahram* could not help but watch as developments brought the narrow gauge railways to the Egyptian countryside.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

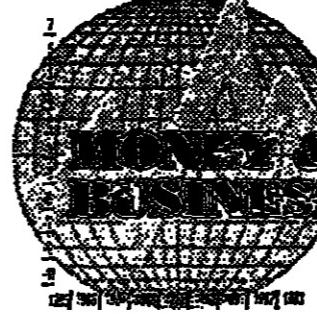


OPEC concerns over Iraq's return

WITH THE growing possibility of Iraq rejoining the international oil market after a 5 year absence, OPEC may have to take decisive measures regarding Iraq's production. Furthermore, OPEC allocated a great balance to boost their production. OPEC declared they are not ready to minimise its production level. There were no comments on Saudi Arabia's reduction of its oil production.

Iraq used to export more than 2 million barrels of crude oil before the Gulf War.

MONEY & BUSINESS



NBE and a new marketing strategy for Egyptian exports

THE ACCELERATION of Egyptian exports has recently gained special momentum as one of the challenges encountering the Egyptian economy, given the crucial role of exportation activity in boosting the economic reform programme, especially with the emergence of the second phase.

The National Bank of Egypt (NBE) places special emphasis on marketing and publicity, as the most effective export-stimulating tools. To this end, NBE adopts a new trend tilted towards establishing the Egypt Houses Company, mainly focusing on organising and establishing exhibitions abroad for marketing different Egyptian products within the framework of a well-planned advertising programme.

In addition, the said company aims at providing businessmen and producers with detailed data regarding the world markets, competitors, prices and quality requirements via the creation of an information centre. Moreover, the company plans to provide the necessary services conducive to exporting samples to external exhibitions, besides facilitating the conclusion of deals with importers. This is in addition to rendering sophisticated services, especially those related to the various kinds of storage.

The company is envisaged to be established according to the German Commercial Law, with an issued capital of DM5mn. The company will

start its activities through establishing an Egyptian House in Frankfurt, with total investments of DM1.8mn, given that the remainder of the capital shall be allocated to establishing other exhibitions in different countries, mainly the United States, England and South Africa, in addition to a host of Arab countries according to market conditions and developments.

In coordination with the Banks Association of Egypt, NBE will promote the company among member banks. Moreover, the Egyptian Industries Federation, various competent authorities, Egyptian businessmen and exporters and one of the Egyptian figures settling in Germany, will be invited to take part in this ambitious project. The National Bank of Egypt International (London) is envisaged to have an effective equity participation in the company.

Marked with its leading role in enhancing exports, NBE has participated in modernising and marketing handicraft industries locally and abroad. The bank has also expanded the scope of financing the import of raw materials and intermediary commodities necessary for the final product to be exported. In addition, the bank finances exporters with up to 70-80 per cent of the transaction amount and extends buyer's credit and factoring services. Finally, NBE provides exporters and importers with forward contracts as a hedge against exchange and interest rate fluctuations.

Chinese delegation visits free zones

FINANCE Minister Mohieddin El-Gharib met with a Chinese delegation currently visiting Cairo. The delegation, headed by the Chinese chairman of economic zones and former minister of economy, is scheduled to visit the free zones of Alexandria and Port Said upon the invitation extended by Ibrahim Fawzi, head of the executive branch of the General Investment Authority. Fawzi stated that detailed discussions were carried out on investment in Egypt and the economic liberalisation policy.

Danish-Egyptian power projects

DENMARK has called upon Egypt for the expertise it has acquired in the area of new and renewable forms of energy to establish a number of projects involving electricity generation and industrial heating and cooling. This suggestion by Denmark essentially makes Egypt a partner in conveying this knowledge to other nations.

Cooperation in this regard was the result of a meeting held recently between the Egyptian minister of electricity and power, Maher Abaza, and the Danish minister of international cooperation, P. Nielsen, along with a Danish delegation visiting Egypt. Abaza explained that during the meeting, specific steps were examined for setting up a regional control station for electrical power in Al-Qana, which would be financed by the Danish Development Organisation with 187mn kroner (approx. LE112mn). This is in accordance with the goal to increase the distribution of electricity to all parts of the country.

The minister explained that preliminary discussions between the two countries have been completed, resulting in Denmark granting 50mn kroner (approx. LE30mn) to finance a project prepared by the Egyptian Electrical Authority, which would bring electricity to those parts of the governorates lacking such a necessity.

The minister explained that preliminary discussions between the two countries have been completed, resulting in Denmark granting 50mn kroner (approx. LE30mn) to finance a project prepared by the Egyptian Electrical Authority, which would bring electricity to those parts of the governorates lacking such a necessity.

Computers, banking and security systems.

Mars further explained that the Middle East is anticipating billions of dollars worth of investments within this field in the forthcoming years, increasing the density of regional telecommunications that involves the completion of a fibre-optics network that will connect South and East Asia, the Middle East and West African countries.

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THE EXHIBITIONS Organisation, in cooperation with the German company Fair Trade, is organising an international telecommunications exhibition in Cairo to be held from 25-28 November of this year, coinciding with the Cairo economic summit. Rushdi Saqr, head of the Exhibitions Organisation, explained that this specialised fair is the first of its kind, organised within the frame-

work of the organisation's new policy aimed at adapting to the requirements of an ever-changing world by marketing within specialised exhibitions, which are gradually replacing general exhibitions. The Exhibitions Organisation has agreed with Fair Trade to set up 2 other specialised trade exhibitions in February 1997: an agricultural exhibition, and a textiles and leather exhibition.

Martin Mars, head of Fair Trade, explained during a visit to Egypt that the Cairo International Telecommunications Exhibition will feature a large number of global telecommunications companies, in addition to companies represented in Egypt and the Middle East which are keen to participate.

Mars indicated that the exhibition would display the most important advances made in telecommunications dealing with, among other things,



The road ahead

For Arafat, the celebrations over his landslide victory in last week's Palestinian elections will quickly give way to the more arduous task of nation-building — a chore at once made more trying by Israeli intransigence and a hawkish opposition in the form of Hamas.

And so, with all eyes upon him, Arafat now shoulders the responsibility of proving himself to be the conduit to independence and the vanguard of a sustainable peace. The elections, successful as they may have been, were merely the starting point along the long road to self-determination and democracy. Now comes the greatest obstacle, manoeuvring through the final stage negotiations in May to determine whether an autonomous Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital, will be.

Israel is bound to complicate matters. Already, Peres has cautioned, attempting to detract from Arafat's new-found status as president, that the assertions about autonomy are premature as the Oslo accords "have their limits". The question that Peres should be raising following the elections, however, is what are the limits of peace? Instead, however, Israel has pinned the outcome of these negotiations on a revision of the Palestinian charter. To this demand, Arafat has conceded, pledging that two months after the elections, the offending clauses will be removed. But at what point will Israel wholeheartedly work for peace versus obstructing it through conditions laid down on the pretext of security interests?

Even without these addendums, Arafat faces an uphill struggle to unite a disgruntled people. He is charged with the onerous task of paving the way for a democracy currently threatened by extremist elements hell-bent on derailing the current peace initiative, which they deem incompatible with the greater Palestinian cause.

In light of these challenges, the celebrations should not be for the conclusion of the elections, but for what they symbolise — the development of a new state and the partial realisation of a dream.

Over the coming months, Arafat will seek to strike a balance between the demands of the opposition, the needs of the new government and the wavering will of the Israelis. It is, at best, a precarious balancing act representative of an even more precarious quest for peace, but with cooperation, coordination and determination, a new country could be born.

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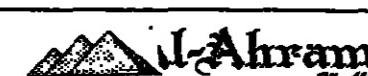
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Crossing the threshold

Ibrahim Nafie
outlines the strategies necessary if Egypt is to enter the next century with confidence



As Egypt approaches the threshold of the 21st century we are sure to face many challenges. And if we are to cross that threshold without equivocation, we must ensure that the nation is equipped to withstand the buffeting of the winds of change. It is important, therefore, that as the new century approaches, we decide on a list of priorities, of things that have to be done in preparation for the new millennium.

Fortunately Egypt is not lacking in the raw materials for success. We have vast human resources and ample natural reserves. Egypt occupies an important strategic position, and possesses an unrivalled historical depth. And these advantages will prove of inestimable value as we chart our path into the next century. But we cannot rely solely on past experience — new challenges require new solutions.

If there is no lack of potential, it must first be harnessed. But how are we to do this? Where should we begin?

President Mubarak outlined the perimeters of the strategy that will see Egypt successfully into the next century in his address to the new cabinet. The manner in which that strategy is applied will be the determining factor in defining Egypt's role in a region that is undergoing fundamental changes as a result of the ongoing peace process.

To launch ourselves successfully into the next millennium will require a great deal of preparation. All segments of society must be encouraged and equipped to meet the challenges we face. In short, we must work towards the construction of a new society, based on our past experiences but keeping an eye on the future.

This is not a task for the government alone. Governments, after all, can act only to facilitate progress, to make it possible for each individual to capitalise on his or her own po-

tential. But for the nation to truly succeed we must each, as individuals, fulfill our side of the bargain. Each citizen is, after all, a partner in the building of our common nation.

As peace unfolds, so our region will come to be characterised by increased cooperation and economic competition. The prestige of individual countries within the region will be determined by their ability to come to terms with the economic challenges that lie ahead. As a consequence, if we are to see Egyptian society evolve in any meaningful way, that evolution must go hand in hand with the changes that are re-drawing the map of the region and redefining the bases of power and influence.

"We look forward to seeing a new Egyptian society and a new Middle East which will move towards ever greater stability," So said President Mubarak at a press conference held during US Vice President Al Gore's visit to Egypt. But for that new society to be viable it must evolve in a manner that is compatible with over-

all regional developments. The two must be complementary if we are to realise our vision for the future.

We cannot expect to develop in a vacuum. Our strategies must take account of the rapid pace of technological change that is changing the face not just of developing countries, but of the whole world. The world is witnessing unprecedented changes, greater even than those occasioned by the industrial revolution of the 19th century. The technological advances of the last few decades, particularly in the fields of communications, genetics and space exploration, constitute nothing less than a revolution. Silent it may be, but it is a revolution that shapes, and continues to shape, our common future.

The communications revolution has made national borders increasingly porous. No country is an island and no nation can live in isolation, unaffected by such unprecedented levels of technological advance. Interdependence is now the name of the game. Goods and services are traded in the international,

not in national market places. Progress now can only be achieved supra-nationally, through cooperation and partnership between nations.

Egypt now enjoys a greater level of political stability than at any other time in its recent history. Such stability allows for the continuation of the economic reform programme that we began to implement several years ago, taking into account, of course, the needs of the population. The manner in which economic reforms have been implemented leads to optimism for the future, and provides an incentive to travel further along the same road.

We have already made considerable advances. If we have the will to reduce the budget deficit and ensure that levels of inflation do not rise, then we will be able to capitalise on the gains already made. We have managed, so far, to implement reforms without incurring unnecessary social costs and we must continue along the same path, protecting the interests of the poorest members of our society while si-

multaneously encouraging private sector led growth.

To have a reasonable chance of eradicating unemployment we must work towards securing a growth rate of at least 8 per cent. But unemployment is not the only problem we must tackle if we are to eradicate poverty in our new society. We must also work towards raising per capita incomes, ensuring that the benefits that accrue from growth are distributed fairly.

Young people must be encouraged to become active citizens, embracing the opportunities offered by expanding markets. Encouraging small businesses is one of the most efficient ways of lowering levels of unemployment, which if they are high can lead to disillusionment, particularly among the young. But such encouragement means removing the bureaucratic obstacles that hinder the setting up or expansion of small businesses.

We must wage a constant war against unnecessary red tape. Investors must be allowed to invest with the minimum of bureaucratic intervention. Exporters must be allowed to conduct their business without unnecessary official interference, since export-led growth is one of the surest ways of maintaining economic expansion.

A healthy economy promotes a healthy society, a society that can have no place for terrorism. Economic and social well-being go hand in hand. They are interdependent. A robust economy demands a well-trained and educated work force. A healthy society should prioritise education, since it constitutes an investment in the future. Yet despite efforts already undertaken to improve educational standards, we still have a long way to go before we are in a position to confidently face the challenges that will come at the century's draw to a close. They are challenges we must afford not to grasp.

An uninvited courtship

By Naguib Mahfouz



I was deeply saddened when I learned that the international media had allocated space in its news bulletins to the announcement that certain people in Egypt were initiating court proceedings intended to divorce me from my wife, on the grounds that my novel, *Children of Gebelawi*, shows that I am an infidel. The malicious media circus appears to have been based on nothing more than the threat of such action, which begs the question, how would the media react if such proceedings actually took place?

In some ways I should be glad to see *Children of Gebelawi* set before an honest judge. I know that the novel is not blasphemous and that I am not infidel. Indeed, when the novel was published 30 years ago I was told by Hassan Sabi El-Kholi, the then personal representative of Gamal Abdel Nasser, that a committee from Al-Azhar would be coming to meet me to discuss the novel. I welcomed the meeting, and went to my office on the agreed date. No one came.

The only cause of distress about the whole business, apart from the negative light in which the foreign media will undoubtedly cast Egypt, is the fact that I might be forced to spend what few days are left to me in court houses. I have never entered a court room in my life and now I feel a little too old to break the habits of a lifetime just to be dragged through the courts.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Sabawy.

Media and pre-emptive diplomacy

Commenting on a UNESCO seminar on promoting independent and pluralistic Arab media held in Sana'a last week, **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** describes its accomplishments as a successful illustrations of UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali's 'pre-emptive diplomacy'

are inadequate to help prevent tears in the fabric of Arab society. The Sana'a meeting carried a tacit warning from the UN and UNESCO, in the spirit of Boutros Ghali's 'pre-emptive diplomacy', that the Arab media should be granted greater freedom to enable them to face the coming challenges.

Participants at the meeting engaged in a candid discussion of the current restrictions under which the Arab media are forced to operate, the impact of emergency laws on their performance and their subordination in most Arab countries to state policy. Asked to address the issue of censorship and self-censorship, I pointed out that while the former is imposed by the state and can therefore not be dealt with conclusively in a gathering of media experts, the most critical issue for media integrity that the meeting should address is self-censorship.

However, should this scenario materialise, it will provoke critical reactions throughout the Arab world, including an escalation of terrorism. Islamic fundamentalism will become the most potent ideology by which grassroots opposition to the Arab regimes' acceptance of Israel as a normal state in the region will manifest itself. As matters now stand, the largely government-controlled Arab media

can only be justified in exceptional circumstances, but is unacceptable when it becomes the rule. The reaction to the recent press law in Egypt demonstrates that when journalists join forces and openly express dissatisfaction, restrictive measures can be successfully resisted. The existence of investigative journalism is also a means of gauging how independent the media are and to what extent they exercise self-censorship.

When radio and television are under tight government control (that is, subject to full censorship) and the written press, whose readership remains limited, is partially censored, government risks becoming isolated from society. It also risks having to contend with a parallel or alternative press characterised by its opposition to, and its attacks on, the government which in turn leads to a process of mutual demonisation.

In the absence of a constructive dialogue, the press is transformed into virtual fictions and the door is open to social violence. Moreover, these leftovers from the totalitarian era, censorship and self-censorship, are self-defeating in an age of electronic media, where unlike newspapers which can be consigned to oblivion.

participation in the vote would mean that they would lose their status as residents of the city.

The cover story of October magazine was "Um Khalil competes with Arafat", in which it said: "The international observers who came to supervise the elections feared attacks to impede the elections by Jewish and Islamist fundamentalists." They also questioned Arafat's performance and his ability to accept Palestinian opposition parties within the PNA as well as his readiness to give up his autocratic style of governing.

The observers also saw the main problem facing Arafat as the lack of representation of three million diaspora Palestinians. This in addition to the fact that the boycott of the election frontiers abroad and that of members of the executive and judicial bodies.

Former US President Jimmy Carter, who participated in supervising the elections, said the Israeli authorities had imposed an atmosphere of terror to impede the electoral process, particularly in Jerusalem. The holy city was turned into a military barracks — not to protect the voters but to annoy them in

which he says: "Whenever one reviews the history of the present century, one will find that the Palestinian-Israeli issue was the most important for the Arab nation. And it can be said that this issue spanned the entire 20th century — a full century involving many generations — and its turbulence has not yet subsided."

On Monday Al-Akhbar said editorially: "The Israeli authorities intervened and tried to impede the elections so as to prevent the Palestinians from exercising their legal democratic right. But the Palestinian people were

sistent on participating in the elections and resisted all attempts to prevent them from doing so. The result was that most of the voters were able to cast their votes for the selection of the president and members of the executive and judicial bodies.

Former US President Jimmy Carter, who participated in supervising the elections, said the Israeli authorities had imposed an atmosphere of terror to impede the electoral process, particularly in Jerusalem. The holy city was turned into a military barracks — not to protect the voters but to annoy them in

every possible way. The Palestinians can tell all Israeli plans to continue to exercise their dominance over the areas they still hold on to by uniting their ranks and encouraging cooperation between the various Palestinian factions."

In the opposition press, Al-Wafd gave

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Electoral fallout

Although Yasser Arafat stated that he would have preferred to have won by 51 per cent of votes, he showed little displeasure at having received over 88 per cent. The results of the election, after all, signify the absence of a real political alternative as expressed in the opposition, which is unable to offer the Palestinian people a viable option to that of peaceful settlement with Israel.

Hamas, the main opposition force, has deliberately — and by earlier agreement with Arafat — refrained from asserting itself as a political organisation. Yet a number of Hamas sympathisers, running as independents, were successful in the elections. And while those members of the old guard of PLO, who have consistently opposed the peace concluded by Arafat with Israel, have remained silent; others may well have run on their behalf. They, along with independent candidates such as Haider Abd-Shafi and Hanan Ashrawi, may form a political bloc, which although it cannot really consider an opposition in the real sense of the word will no doubt prove less compliant to the wishes of Yasser Arafat than he might want.

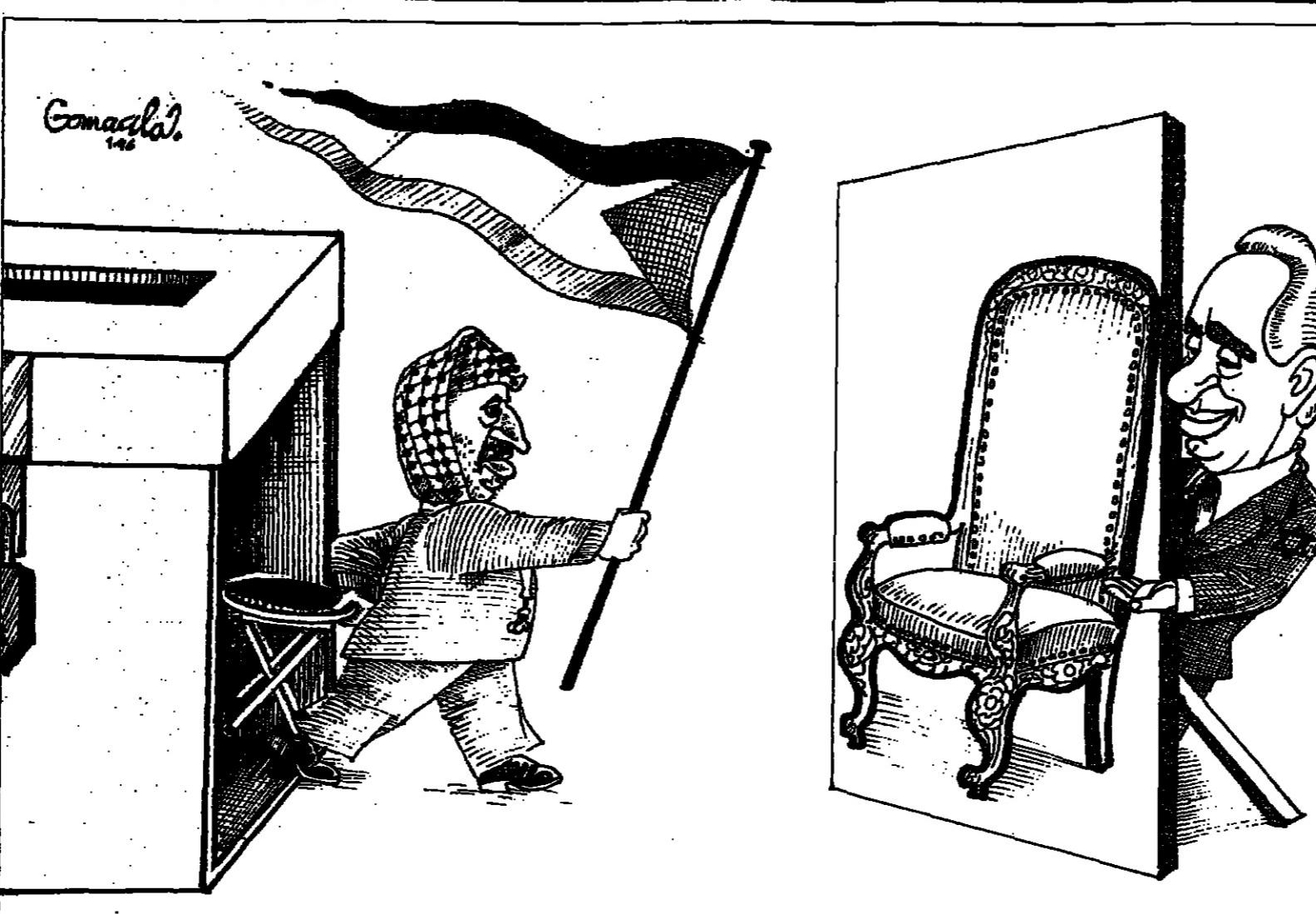
It is perhaps the case that Arafat is less in need of a landslide victory than he is of constructive and level-headed opposition. Such an opposition could act as a watch dog, preventing any abuses of power taking root within the nascent Palestinian administration. But above all, a coherent opposition could act as an important safety valve, consolidating Arafat's position and ability to withstand Israeli pressures during the upcoming phase in the negotiations.

It is the upcoming phase, after all, that will determine the outcome of issues that are vital to both the Palestinian people and the Palestinian state. And the presence of an opposition takes on particular importance in the light of criticism, voiced not only by his detractors but also by his long term supporters in Fatah, that Arafat has a tendency to take decisions alone. Fears have also grown about the tendency of Arafat's immediate circle to monopolise the decision making process, effectively excluding the effective participation of those not included in their circle, and creating a repressive state structure. Given this background, we should not be surprised then by the suspicions that accompanied the announcement that election results would be delayed. Inevitably, charges would be voiced that the National Authority was tampering with votes.

The derogation of articles displeasing to Israel in the national charter will be the first problem which Arafat will have to face after the establishment of the selected council. Israel has given its permission for the members of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) (hitherto described as the Palestinian parliament in exile) to return. It is not clear, however, whether the PNC, which consists of appointed members to represent all factions of the Palestinian resistance, including such opposition leaders as Habash and Hawatmeh, is mandated to effect such changes on the national charter, or if such functions are reserved for the newly elected council. And though there is a general understanding that members of the elected assembly will automatically become members of the National Palestinian Council, the question of integration remains ambiguous and depends, to a great extent, on the composition of the new assembly and on the wishes of Arafat himself.

Certainly the establishment and mandate of the new assembly will have many repercussions, the most important of which will relate to the future of the PLO. Will it stay or go? How will the PLO impact the course of events in the future?

One thing, though, is certain. What we are witnessing is a new era, not only in the history of Palestinian political action, but in the personal history of Arafat himself, now the elected president of all Palestinians.

**Soapbox****Secularism and *iijihad***

Once upon a time life was simple and definitions were precise. For instance, secularism was defined as the separation of church from state and public life. Gradually, however, people discovered that the state comes in different sizes (small, medium and large) and super-sizes. "Public life", many began to notice, is not less problematic. Take for instance the media, this new slimy octopus, is it a private or public affair when it sets out to shape our self-image and the values of our children?

Some began to protest, some even talked of moral values: the very daring talked of moral absolutes. But there were many sceptics who rightly asked: wherefrom do we derive these values? One party said the human mind; another suggested nature. But the mind comes in different shapes and sizes: instrumental, deconstructive, reductive and downright destructive. Nature too is no longer a refuge. Darwinists, imperialists, rapacious capitalists, Nazis, all appealed to nature.

Once upon a time life was simple, but it no longer is. Therefore, a new *iijihad* is sorely needed. Let us for instance distinguish between two types of secularism — partial and comprehensive. The popular definition which confines secularism to the political sphere is partial secularism. Comprehensive secularism, on the other hand is a total world outlook. Its essence is the belief that the whole world is subject to the laws of nature and matter and therefore all things are equal and all values are relative. This leads humanity in a fluid world with no boundaries or distinctions. Achilles is replaced by Batman, the virgin and child by Madonna, Michelangelo by Michael Jackson and even nation-states by the new international order.

Surely a new *iijihad* is sorely needed.

This week's Soapbox speaker is professor emeritus at Ain Shams University and author of the forthcoming Introduction to the Deconstruction of the Secular Discourse.



Abdewahab Elmessiri

A singular poll, a stronger Palestine

Any assessment of the results of the first-ever Palestinian general elections must be informed by an understanding of the uniqueness of the Palestinian experience, contends **Mahgoub Omar**

The Palestinian elections packed no surprises. They went ahead as scheduled, as per the recent Taba-Washington accords, in spite of predictions to the contrary and Palestinian calls for a boycott. Neither the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the subsequent cabinet reshuffle, nor continued right-wing opposition in Israel derailed the election timetable.

There were no surprises. Voter turnout in the West Bank reached 70 per cent, while in Gaza it was even higher, peaking at 85 per cent. In both Hebron (Khalil) and Arab Jerusalem, it was considerably lower, not exceeding 37 per cent, a result, as international observers noted, of the obstacles and threats emanating from Israel's security forces who seemed intent on terrorising voters into staying at home.

The results of the balloting, too, held few surprises, as Yasser Arafat prevailed over his only challenger, Samiha Khalil. Nevertheless, that a female candidate should have won ten per cent of the total vote is, in itself, significant.

The results of the Legislative Council elections are significant in so much as they serve as a general indicator. The Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah) candidates, whether they were nominated by the party leadership or whether they nominated themselves over the objections of the leadership, all won. Other important figures who ran as independents also gained seats in the 88-member council. These include Haider Abd-Shafi and Hanan Ashrawi, both prominent Palestinian negotiators.

The elections, by all accounts, were relatively free and fair, though it would be naive to deny that there were certain isolated attempts to circumvent the will of the voters. The National Authority, which drew up the electoral law and designated the districts, certainly appeared to attempt to intervene to manipulate the voting process. Nevertheless, the elections were, on the whole, well organised and conducted in a manner that does

credit to the image of the new Palestine.

Before the elections it had been suggested that all the territories of the National Authority be included within a single electoral district. While this format may have been more democratic by the standards of modern electoral processes it could well have resulted in disaster had it been applied on the ground. It would have opened the field to the numerous political and social forces within Palestinian society that lack the popular support and grassroots organisation to have any hope of success.

If people had higher or different expectations from these elections, perhaps their mistake was to try and compare them to elections held in other countries. Circumstances in Palestine necessarily make everything that occurs there unique, a fact that applies to elections as much as to anything else.

The Palestinian issue, by virtue of a complex of international, regional, domestic and psychological factors, has never fitted neatly into the formulas that apply elsewhere. International observers, it appears, failed to take on board the fact that while the Palestinian elections outwardly resembled other balloting processes, it was the first time ever that the Palestinian people had been called upon to elect a chairman and a legislative council. This factor alone proved sufficient to encourage thousands of Palestinians to vote, regardless of whether or not they supported the Oslo agreements or were critical of Yasser Arafat and his style of rule. This is why the Palestinians converged in such great numbers on the polling booths, though the rest of their compatriots outside the Occupied Territories were deprived of the right to vote. Through their participation, they expressed the long cherished hope that one day their loved ones abroad will be able to return.

To human rights groups and advocates of Western liberal democracy the word elections automatically evokes the need for guarantees. This is understandable, though we should not ignore the fact that the uniqueness of the Palestinian situation also

gives rise to other needs.

In the mind of every Palestinian voter one consideration was uppermost: that these elections constituted a step towards the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Unlike apparently similar elections elsewhere, much more was involved than the election of a chairman and legislative council. Rather, the elections have been viewed as a means of conferring legitimacy on the Palestinian Authority and guaranteeing a form of national "independence", even from the occupying power, Israel.

It would be very useful to study the Palestinian elections in light of their effect on Palestinian society in general, and on specific groups in particular. It is of more immediate import, however, to analyse how the elections will affect the Palestinian cause in the international arena and how they will influence the future of the negotiating process. At such an historic juncture perhaps it was the image of Palestine abroad that was foremost in the mind of the Fatah leadership — who head

the National Authority — when they drew up the electoral lists and procedures. Certainly there appears to have been a desire to ensure that the legislative council would reflect a balance of all the components of Palestinian society without exception. Even if Fatah garnished the overwhelming majority of votes, its leaders have attempted to ensure that political plurality be achieved. They were careful to select their candidates so as to reflect the diversity of Palestinian society. Even those who broke away from the Fatah lists and succeeded in the elections will continue to work within the framework of Fatah. Fatah never dismissed them, nor would one have expected it to do so.

Finally, the elections were always intended to give the seal of legitimacy to everything the PLO has done, an intention that explains the insistence of the Palestinian leadership on the presence of international observers. It was not so much who won that was important, but the very fact that the elections took place at all, and once they were taking place, attracted such a high turn-out. All strands of political opinion were represented, including those opposed to the negotiations and the Oslo agreements. And it is the breadth of participation that has lent depth to the claims of legitimacy voiced by the leadership, the National Authority and, indeed, by Palestine itself.

The elections have resulted in a changed Palestinian entity, even though, to outward appearances, and in terms of its constituent elements, it might seem much the same as before. But over the coming few weeks we should see the emergence of a stronger Palestine, a Palestine better prepared to enter the final phase of negotiations.

The writer is a political analyst and an expert on Palestinian affairs.

A vote of desperation

If Arafat is the winner, the true loser in the Palestinian elections is democracy, argues **Mohamed El-Sayed Said**

When Yasser Arafat announced that the elections of 20 January heralded a new stage in the emergence of the Palestinian state he was probably right. Significantly he did not mention Palestinian democracy. He was probably right there too since democracy was not, in fact, being put to the test in these elections. In fact democracy had already lost before the polling booths opened.

The Arab World has furnished enough examples for us to realise that, contrary to conventional wisdom, elections are not necessarily an instrument of democratisation. Elections can easily be coopted to achieve the opposite — it is to consolidate authoritarian rule. The majority of Arab observers, however, assumed that the Palestinian elections would be different. Nor were they being mindlessly optimistic, since they had valid reasons for this belief. Palestinians were, after all, emerging from an extended national struggle that had given birth to the intifada. The pluralistic structure of the Palestinian national movement gave cause for hope.

The fact that the opposition factions (they deserve to be called factions rather than parties) helped ease

the triumph of the Arafat party should have come as no surprise, except, perhaps, when it comes to the leaders of the intifada, who were virtually annihilated in the election results.

All the indications lead us to the single and profoundly sad conclusion: the Palestinian people have delegated power exclusively into the hands of the Arafat party. They have done so with their eyes open, perfectly aware that the people for whom they have voted will be unable to survive within the context of a pluralistic and challenging political structure. Arafat and his supporters were looking for an unconditional delegation of power. The people have willingly given them what they wanted.

The winners of these elections, then, won on their own terms. But why? How can it be that a nation that has made so many sacrifices, for so long, should suddenly decide

to commit political suicide?

Any explanation of the results of the elections that cites the personal popularity of Mr Arafat is singularly unconvincing. Arafat's personal popularity rating, as determined by the opinion polls undertaken on a monthly basis by the Palestinian Research Centre, has never crept above 40 per cent. This means that there are more Arafat opponents and sceptics than there are believers. Inter-family rivalry may well have helped Arafat, a past master at playing people off against each other. But if this is the case, we must face the question why, after transcending family and other traditional loyalties for so long, has Palestinian politics suddenly turned its back on the achievements of the intifada?

Explanations based on the impact of the boycott and the vacating of the political arena, allowing for the uncontested influence of Fatah, are also far from convincing. Certainly

the boycott encouraged apolitical elections, though the high voter turn-out shows that boycott calls struck a chord in very few members of the electorate.

How then can we credibly account for the election results? How else but by acknowledging that, after their incredible sacrifices and seemingly endless struggle, the Palestinian people are at last showing signs of exhaustion. They have fought alone for so long now, isolated from the Arab world and from progressive international opinion, that they appear finally to be giving up the ghost. Certainly the results show just how hopeless the majority of Palestinians feel when it comes to taking a tougher negotiating stance with Israel.

It is in this context that we can begin to comprehend the defeat at the polls of the intifada leaders who, just a few years ago, were the focus of unadulterated adoration. In this

context too it is possible to understand the rejection of boycott calls, and even the reemergence of traditional family loyalties.

The elections seem to symbolise a surrender, by the Palestinian people, to the only party which has the power and will to make do with what the Israelis allow and accept what they may conceivably give. The Palestinian people have, in a sense, taken a decision not to continue with the kind of sacrifices they made in the past in the course of their lonely and desperate struggle against the vast Israeli war machine. In this sense the elections are the mirror reflection, the exact opposite, of the spirit that gave rise to the intifada.

We are witnessing that moment in the lonely evolution of a nation when its people, after monumental struggles, take refuge in traditional ways, and show themselves willing to capitulate to despots and manipulators.

The writer is deputy director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

Less than 50 per cent of the Palestinian people, on less than five per cent of their land, possessing neither military nor economic force and besieged on all sides by one of the most sophisticated military and intelligence machines in the world — no less sophisticated for being augmented by tens of thousands of heavily armed, half-crazed and violent racist vigilantes called settlers — now have a *razaq*, a term which could be translated in a variety of ways ranging from president to chairman to merely boss, but which under Israeli directives is now to enter the dictionaries of all the world's languages as the unique title of the head of the Palestinian authority.

Having no control over their economy, their water, their land, not to speak of foreign policy or defence, Palestinians on the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank have also won an elected council which is no less unique than the title of their *razaq*. It looks like a legislative council, or parliament, but it is not to be named as such — again following Israeli directives. Wisely perhaps. Parliaments are supposed to be "sovereign", an embodiment of the people's, or the na-

tional will. This is an absurdity when neither the people nor the nation are sovereign, when most of the people are disenfranchised as refugees, when the Palestinian executive is in fact accountable to Israel, its legislature and executive, and not to the Palestinian people and their quasi-legislature. And, finally, when this quasi-legislature — which is neither a local nor a national council — shares most of the attributes of the bulk of its bigger sisters in sovereign Arab states, in being totally under the thumb of the executive power.

In spite of all this, one cannot dismiss with a mere shrug the prevailing sentiment among Palestinians inside the "self-rule" territories. Whatever the scale of electoral irregularities, a sizeable majority of the electorate turned out for the poll, despite the boycott calls by the opposition, and that it did so with enthusiasm, even a sense of exhilaration.

And why not? The right to possess a passport is cause enough for exhilaration, even if it is of little worth, since most Palestinians (terrorist suspects all, until proven otherwise) will still be barred from entry to most of the world's countries, and since even this passport is denied

to more than half of their number. The right to raise one's national flag is no less a cause for enthusiasm, even if it remains a symbolic gesture with little meaning in terms of actual national sovereignty. The right, indeed the mere ability, to walk down one's home town streets without being abused, put against a wall and bodily searched if lucky, arrested, beaten or shot if not, is no less a cause for celebration, even if the crazed settlers and blood-hardened soldiers are still there, right at the outskirts of the town.

After exhaustion, decades upon decades of mind-boggling suffering and ultimately futile sacrifice, a virtual global conspiracy under which the apartheid-style banishments currently being established on Palestinian lands are hailed by all and sundry as a triumph of peace and justice, as historic breakthroughs. All of this and an utter absence of any alternative Palestinian strategy, in spite of any Palestinian strategy, casts the enthusiasm with which voters met last week's poll as eminently sensible.

I do not believe that the high voter turn-out, the 88 per cent vote for Arafat, the Fatah landslide and the clan-

Voting for a breathing space

based, apolitical voting pattern, were a vote of confidence for Arafat's strategy, which, as Edward Said has amply demonstrated, amounts to little more than kow-towing to American/Israeli dictates. And, faced with the alternative of a futile, self-destructive and morally-reprehensible alternative "strategy" presented by the left-wing opposition, Palestinians have opted for the age-old strategy of oppressed people everywhere — coping. Under a strategy of coping, one makes do, counts one's small blessings and is thankful for any mitigation of suffering, however slight. It is a perfectly sensible strategy. And if any people on the face of this earth deserve a reprieve, it's the Palestinians.

A reprieve may also provide the space needed to formulate a new strategy, one that subjects all previous strategic ventures to a thorough critique and takes into account the new possibilities for a genuinely liberationist and humanitarian Palestinian project. For on the other side, things are happening too. Zionist tribalism, fostered by war and violence, is showing signs of deep fractures.

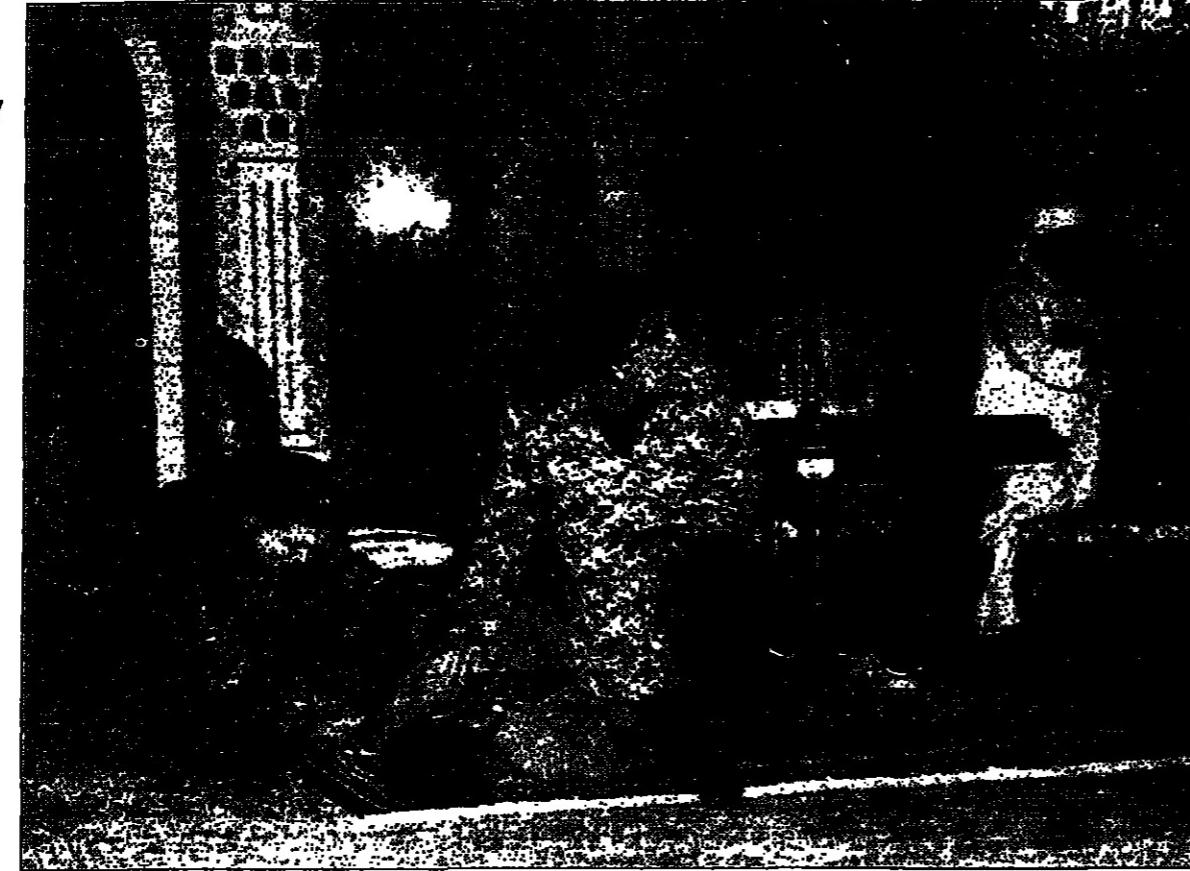
Blow up

Nehad Selaiha
dodges the bullets at
Al-Salam Theatre

In 1992, the state-theatre organisation thought Mohammed Salimay's *Al-Zahra wal Ganzir* (The Flower and the Chain) too hot a coal to handle even with a pair of tongs. It was the first Egyptian play (indeed, work of art) to come openly to grips with the explosive issue of religious fundamentalism and engage its advocates in heated debate.

Three years later, just as '95 was folding up, the play, in a slightly modified version, that sharpened its impact and boldly excised all shilly-shallying, burst with a tremendous éclat at Al-Salam Theatre. It took the irrepressible Galal El-Sharqawi — a director famous for frequently falling foul of the censor — to appreciate the play's smash-hit potential. The plot is simple enough: an Islamic terrorist tricks his way into the home of a middle class family and holds its members hostage to demand the release of fellow terrorists captured by the security forces. But the family's harrowing ordeal is shot through with so much poetry and humour, it becomes positively idyllic in a wistful, elegiac vein. One does not normally associate terrorism, violence and puritanical bigotry with old-world charm and elegance; but here, in *The Chain*, these opposites are magically fused into a tangible mood of tolerance and practical common sense. Rather than distort the family's elegant way of life, the terrorist falls under its spell and is immediately sucked into the patterns of its polished daily routine. He may hold the family at gun point but this does not deter the mother, Zainab (who heads a charitable society that cares for lepers) from preparing the mint sauce that goes with roast meat, nor the daughter, Jasmine, from setting the table properly for dinner. Indeed, having dinner with the family, becomes for the terrorist almost a sacramental ceremony and a purgatorial act. It is at dinner that he learns to expound his views without vulgar brutality and comes closest to being a member of the family.

At every step in the progression of the plot, this illusive undercurrent of bonhomie gives a sad, ironic twinge to



Mohamed Salimay's *Al-Ganzir*: "The two-hour siege inevitably ends in deafening gun shots"

the violent arguments and counter arguments. The menace is always there, but, at times, it seems as if the witty, evocative dialogue has wrapped it round in shiny silk and glistening satin. The sparkling surface occasionally bursts into a riot of comic squibs, but the two-hour siege inevitably ends in suffocating smoke, deafening gun-shots and explosions.

Curiously, the blaze of the tragic ending has a wonderfully liberating effect; it seems, in a positively exhilarating way, to clear the air and the experience is too masochistically attractive to be resisted. No wonder the play has drawn throngs of viewers, and is likely to continue to do so for many more weeks to come. In fact, the cast are so confident of the play's charismatic pull they have decided to perform throughout Ramadan, a month notoriously inimical to serious theatre.

Intellectual daring, moral courage and topical relevance are some of the factors behind the success of *Al-Ganzir*. But there is also its artistic finesse — a factor so subtle that many tend to overlook it. Outwardly, the play is blatantly realistic — almost too close to reality for comfort. But underneath the thin, classical, realistic facade, it has a sophisticated musical construction, with many telling leitmotifs, eloquent counterpoints and elaborate running themes. Gradually, and almost imperceptibly, every character and object in the play (down to

the dumb grandfather clock, the cold fire-place, the shut-down piano, the wizened lotus flower, the many vases, plants and ornamental pieces) acquires a poetic dimension, becoming an image of a metaphor for something else. The whole stage-set evokes an image of a beautiful, enlightened Mediterranean Egypt turned into a shrunk-en effigy — a still, sad travesty of its former elegant, lively self. The members of the family, on the other hand, represent different generations, spanning the modern history of Egypt from the 1919 popular revolt down to the present. The memory of Gamal Abdel-Nasser looms large in the background, overshadowing everything, like long lost dream, reminding the characters and the audience of what could have been but will never be. Though a 'Nasserite', Salimay is too good a playwright to condone hero-worship and military rule. In the play the rule of Nasser, the dead father and absent patriarch (enshrined in a framed portrait above the silent piano), bequeaths to the present an impotent generation of drug addicts and fanatics. The angels of death who storm the flat at the end, just as the terrorist and the family are beginning to come to terms with their differences and learn to live together amicably, are not only the white-clad, bearded members of the *Jama'a*; they are also the grimly blattared, fiercely armed security forces.

The colours of the rainbow do not in-

clude either black or white. Ultimately, these are the negation of colour and difference. To have them so prominently framed both at the beginning and end of the play was painfully significant and had a shattering effect.

Midway through the two-hour performance, Jasmine, the 21-year old Egyptologist, asks Mohamed, the Islamic terrorist (*Youssouf Chahine's* wonderful 'enigma', Khalid El-Nabawi), whether there is a place, in his promised paradise, for educated women who want to pursue a career in music, ecology, physics or psychology, and the answer is a definite, arbitrary no. A woman's place is in the home. A member of the security forces would promptly answer likewise, joining hands with the fundamentalist.

In this kind of riveting show, actors become friends — people you know and love and you feel so terribly, often pretentiously commenting on their performances. Magda El-Khatib made a wonderful come-back as Zainab and Madbouli, as the nearly deaf and blind grandfather, was simply terrific, mixing tragedy and humour in rare, equal balance. Azza Bahaa 'as' Jasmine was overpoweringly beautiful and moving. As for Wa'il Nur and Khalid El-Nabawi, I really cannot say anything. Both were my students and I am deeply prejudiced in their favour. You simply have to go and see their performances and judge for your self. Stunning, I guess, would be your verdict.

Music

Song recital: Neveen Allouba (soprano); David Hales (piano); Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 18 January

Never tell a good *Lieder* singer your secrets. At her next recital you will see yourself as others see you. *Lieder* singers are the supreme eyes, ears and gossip of music. Celebrated *diseuses* and speech singers in all European and Eastern languages have been holding people in thrall since the early Middle Ages. It is the oldest profession in the world but one. This race of singers grew so celebrated, particularly in the Germanic countries, that mighty ones like Beethoven, Wolf and Schubert poured their genius into music to display *Lieder* in all their glory. Once a *Lieder* singer always a *Lieder* singer. They attract huge audiences — Dieskau, Sinatra and Ute Lemper. What gives these people their appeal? Direct contact. They are out there alone on the stage except for an accompanist and, apart from him, they get no help at all. They have little time even to work their effects. So it is direct — and now. Keep your eyes on me, they seem to say.

If the delivery mechanism works as it should, then you will get revelations nothing else in music can touch. Fail, and instant boredom is the punishment. Many times they appear, debut, and that is it. Their quality shows instantly. It is an exalted art.

For the last few years Neveen Allouba has been practicing it — delivering her secrets. The latest of her concerts was the best she has ever given in Cairo. Allouba has power, great inner strength and conviction, and she knows her faults, virtues and limits. Where she is is where it is happening, yet on the surface she does not do much. She provides an emanation. As an actress she has it all inside. She can look ugly and angry, beautiful and exalted, sexy and manipulative or hurt and majestic. She can wear anything, rags or grandeur: both become her. She's *belle pour la scène*. That covers her operatic needs, as yet mostly unfulfilled because of the limitations of the repertory here.

Now that her voice is extending in range, the notes are strengthening and shining better at the top. What a wonderful Judith she would make in Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle*. She understands *Lieder*. She bardly moves. Her face shrinks and she is a gumlet-eyed sur-

geon. At this concert her songs were mostly about people on the dark side of the sun — depression, doubts, despair. Brahms was the first of the seven composers chosen for the evening. Allouba's German diction is firm and clear, with no exaggerated mannerisms or emotions spelt out in capitals. The songs, therefore, had a serenity beneath the ironies which prevented them from being heavy. *Vergebliches standchen* was a mystery unsolved and a despair to be lived through.

The four Hugo Wolf songs were the best items of the evening. Wolf suits her sense of irony and her ability to convey self-mockery. The secrets of the first song were too painful for revelation. The mockery of others was balanced on a razor's edge — anger held in check. The songs had high outbursts and her notes were firm, never explosive, never leaving the dimensions of song. Both *Das verlasiene Magdelein*, the despair of a girl's abandonment, and *Auche kleine dinges*, the small things that matter and are of comfort in this life, were perfect. Allouba held the audience in her practical hands while she enchanted them with the *bel canto* silvery lightness of the spinning out of soft tones. Like all Wolf — moments under the microscope. These songs are jewels. Too airy to capture, they must be remarked upon — that is all. It was exquisite expression. Allouba and her audience were one.

She chose three of Richard Strauss' most difficult songs. He adored high dramatic sopranos and his songs always let fly in very nasty intervals and sudden drops. A year ago, the singing of these songs, particularly *Du meines herzens kronelein*, would have caused Allouba great stress. This night the demands were met perfectly. She never wobbled or flapped on notes over her entire range.

Rachmaninov songs are never cheerful. Slav *mordovitsa* takes command. The three songs chosen were at least comfortable and the Russian words came over. Sometimes not as highly nuanced as a Russian would sing them, but still they soundedearing and imposing.

Mona Ghoneim's two songs stood up well to their exalted

companions of this programme. Dramatic and didactic. Allouba delivered them with rich dark tones.

Then came the Sherif Makhiddin musical settings of poems by Amal Donqol. A few years ago at this same hall they were given their premiere performance by the same artists. Allouba delivered the Arabic words clearly — the messages of a dying man in songs of extreme simplicity. These songs have tunes and phrases which are ideal for the voice, melodies newly imagined and carrying complete conviction.

They place Mohieddin high among Egypt's contemporary composers.

Mohieddin achieves genuine creation with these songs which resemble Benjamin Britten's *Les Illuminations* of Rimbaud. They should be recorded.

Last on the programme came de Falla's *Seven popular Spanish songs*. Through most of the evening David Hales' companionship with Allouba was, as always, faultless. His playing of Wolf was especially fine. In the Rachmaninov the piano was another friend. So what went wrong with Hales and de Falla? He sounded pallid, totally undramatic, doing his best against overwhelming odds. Where were the stabs and steely shocks expected from the piano in these wonderful songs?

No gypsies were present. Maybe they have been done forever by de los Angeles and Gerald Moore? Even Allouba sounded Sussex. But she ended as a gypsy — the one and only — Carmen — the Habanera, and as Carmen, all the bells and bells rang properly for a grand operatic finish. She hardly moved — but character came alive — hard, clever, the erotic challenge, the invitation to join the flamenco dancer Death, to die, to leave.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra: *Talents* (1); Soloists: Salam Sadek (violinist), Amr Abu-Naga (horn); Taha Nagui, conductor; Small Hall, Cairo Opera House; 14 January

Deep into classics land, uniformly, sacred cows grazing contentedly in comfortable pastures. Well fed, well bred. Everything the same as usual and my heart belongs to Daddy. And along comes Max Bruch

and his *Violin concerto*. Worse. Fiddler's Pop.

And along comes Salma Sadek and the brush up begins. Through the walls of fudge and cutting, to see a young talent cutting the fudge without effort, is a balm to the languishing heart of a reviewer. She stands there, tall, no high dressing for Bruch, just a daytime brown, floppy throw-on pullover and casual trousers. She is like a street muse of the 1890s.

Scratch the word classical. In music, yesterday is impossible, today is fast moving out from beneath our ears, tomorrow is the promised land and stars scoop up all the colour that is passing by. And Salma Sadek is a young star in process.

The colour she scooped up this evening, the *Violin concerto* of Bruch, is less stale than thin. Sadek's admirers had expected something more exciting, something that might extend her talents. The Bruch

Concerto no 1 for violin and orchestra is often quite beautiful, sweet, rather pure, direct, smiling, naive, trusting and uncomplicated. Not a popular mix for the young of 1996.

There she stood, poised to strike. What would she do? Dive in? No, she played it like an angel of the annunciation hovering above. She gave her best — which is sumptuous.

She found no technical problems at all in the generous three movements or acts because, really, it is a theatrical show-piece from the great age of fiddlers. But this was or is, was better, the soft underbelly of the big nineteenth century music parade. Once it was almost as popular as the *Blue Danube waltz*. But you cannot dance to it. The well-behaved could weep to it if they wanted. It represents the Europe of expensive furs, veils, long kid gloves for listening and the smell of violet. Lady violinists queued to perform it.

Where did Sadek fit into all this? She did not. She did not even try. She, being the angel from above, looked aloof but with no comment. The allegro song which opens the Bruch gave us a taste of how she would continue. The sweets were there but she was not going to get sticky. Would the team float on the celebrated Turkish delight stream or sugar that is the sec-

ond movement? Swallow it whole and enjoy — and that is exactly what Salma Sadek did. If you must swim, swim through to the end. She let forth her darkest, warmest tones which almost beat the cello for heart throb. She arched the phrases of amber and cyclamen purple up into the dim salon lighting. The second movement left the gaslight and went up to the moon — sad, grandiloquent. And doomed.

It was a young player's startling overview of what is often a soft, sodden masterpiece. The *allegro* had only a certain amount of *energico*. Sadek can go like a Maratani if she wants to, but she held it in proportion, never diminishing the vulnerable Bruch.

Salma Sadek is one of Cairo's treasures. The way the soft art of the not-so-strong creation of Bruch was made to soar easily under a revealing light — pause — then brought softly and safely back to earth again where it belongs, was a demonstration of her unique talent.

The Mozart *Horn concerto in E flat major* is one of the joys of the classical scene. It positively shoots stars and lights from the first moment and it is murder to play. The horn is hardly anyone's instrument because of this. Those who master the horn are as rare as those who master the flute or the harp. Cairo has flute and harp, and now it has a horn player of great quality, Amr Abu-Naga. The horn must never sound blatant; it cannot droop like the saxophone, but it can be ironic.

Abul-Naga showed how much fun it can be. He finished the pranky *rondo* before the orchestra could catch him. He is a Cairo treasure. There are future beauties for him to give.

Haydn wrote so many symphonies that catching up with them is like a run-through a London railway time-table. Tonight's was *No 53 in D major*, a favoured Haydn key. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra, which played throughout the evening, had a hard time fitting itself into the strange, reverberative encounter with the Small Hall's acoustic. It is not that you get too little, but you get too much, and without warning. But sometimes it works. Haydn left the court salons of the Esterhazy and went to the races. Place your bet. We caught the 9.30 spot on time and everyone was happy.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Xanadu Manganaia

Cairo-Berlin Art Gallery, 17 Yousuf Al-Gaziri St, Bab Al-Louq, Tel 395 1764. Daily exc Sun, 1pm-5pm. Open until 23 Jan. Exhibitions of paintings by Alexander-Grecian.

Happy Sunday (Photographs)

French Cultural Centre, 27 Sabri Abu Al-Aswad St, Helipolis. Tel 417 4324. Daily exc Sun, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 25 Jan.

To the Oriental Sources of La Fontaine

French Cultural Centre, Mounira Annex, Madrassa Al-Horreya, Al-Ferjeusey St, Mounira. Tel 355 3725. Daily exc Sun, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 30 Jan.

Discovering the oriental inspirations of fabulist Jean de La Fontaine.

Group Exhibitions

Al-Shorouq Gallery, 12 Rd 150, Al-Horreya Sq, Mounira. Tel 340 0081. Daily exc Fri, 10am-4pm & 7pm-8pm. Until 31 Jan.

Twelve Alexandria artists exhibit.

The Right To Hope (Paintings)

Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Shatii Al-Marsafy St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Il Viaggio (The Journey) 25 Jan, 8.30pm.

Directed by Vittorio De Sica, 1974; starring Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni.

Twenty-one countries exhibit in celebration of the UN's golden anniversary. Gizehby Siria represents Egypt.

Paintings and photographs under the title A Life For Art.

Art in School

Italian Cultural Centre, as above. Until 31 Jan.

Children's drawings and paintings.

Amr Helba (Drawings and Paintings)

Cairo-Berlin Art Gallery, 17 Yousuf Al-Gaziri St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 395 1764. Daily exc Sun, 1pm-5pm & 6pm-10pm. Until 29 Jan-1 Feb.

Paintings and photographs under the title A Life For Art.

Alberto Burri

Zamalek Centre of Arts, 1 Al-Mashakhi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-3.30pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 29 Feb.

Works by El-Sayed Naseeb.

Salma Sadek

Al-Saadet, 36/4 Ahmed Orabi St, Mokattab. Tel 346 3242. Daily exc Fri, 10am-3.30pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 18 Feb.

Chair designed by 26 Egyptian artists.

Alfred Stieglitz (Photographs)

Sony Gallery, AUC, Al-Sheriff Rd, 1st Floor, Al-Gazira. Tel 340 8212. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 29 Feb.

An exhibition of work by Alfred Stieglitz, celebrated American photographer. Stieglitz pioneered the use of cameras in the snow and rain; the first to photograph skyscrapers, clouds and airplanes and was one of the pioneers of colour photography.

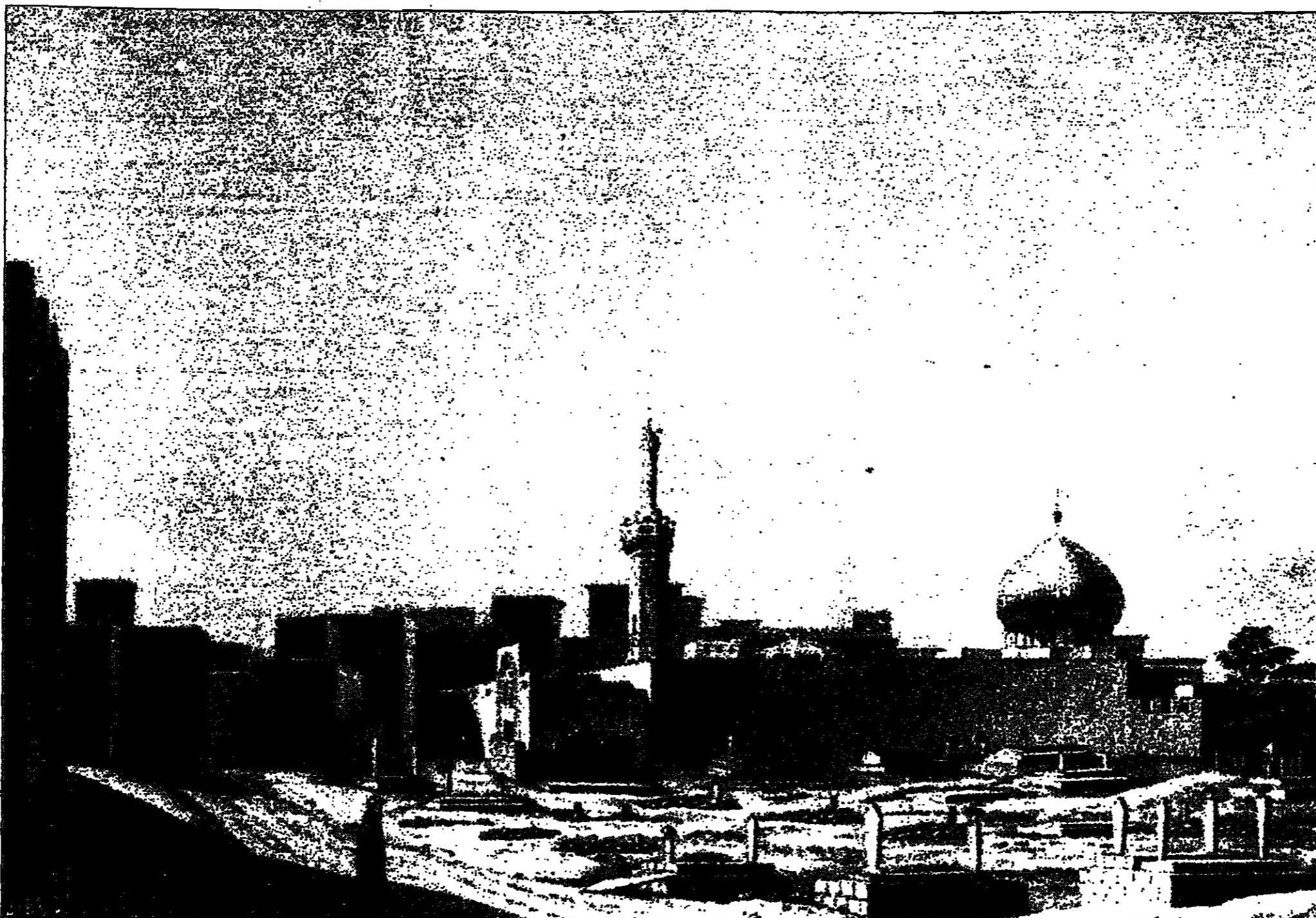
The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Khairi

Karin II, 12 Tahrik St, Dokki. Tel 376 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-4pm.

Egypt's largest collection of nine-teenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khairi, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Manet and Rodin.

Egyptian Museum

Beneath Alexander's brolly



Alexandria's Islamic cemeteries, as they appeared to Napoleon's savants at the end of the 18th century. The engraving appeared in the second volume of the *Description de l'Egypte*

Lutfi Abdel-Wahab examines the many themes addressed in a recent conference which took as its topic Alexander the Great and Alexandria

From 15 to 19 January — and in the same spacious hall in the Centre of Conferences in Alexandria used two years ago — the Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University, held the second of its biannual conferences on "Cultural Interaction among the Mediterranean Peoples". The great difference between the two occasions was the provision, this year, of a single theme which all contributions were intended to address, namely: "Alexander the Great and Alexandria".

The idea of holding a series of conferences dealing with the "togetherness" of the Mediterranean peoples originated, as indeed it was bound to do, from an ever-present fact on both the historical and the cultural planes, though for one reason or another this "togetherness" is not always fully recognised as a living and unavoidable dimension in the lives of the societies whose lands border on the shores of the sea which got its very name from the fact that it lies right in their midst. But if the concept itself provided the general atmosphere in which the conference was convened the direct incentive behind holding and hosting the two conferences so far emanates from a vibrant reality — the creation, in 1979, of an "Institute for Mediterranean Studies", founded as part of the Faculty of Arts in Alexandria.

The present conference was chaired by Professor Mohamed Abdou Mahgoub, dean of the Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University. Dr Selham El-Qarch, chairperson of the Phonetics Department, acted as head of the executive committee. Together they were responsible for overseeing the two years of almost continuous preparation that ensured that the general consensus about the conference was that it was a rewarding experience, a view shared by overseas and Egyptian participants. Despite the expected last minute apologies, the event attracted more than 60 and, apart from the naturally Egyptian majority, a good number of participants, including representatives from 11 Arab and European universities and research centres. Several countries, including Syria, Jordan, Greece, Italy and the United Kingdom, were represented by more than one participant.

Apart from the number and provenance of the participants, the seriousness of the response was indicated by the number of side-themes which branched off the main one — that of Alexander the Great and Alexandria.

Books

Conjuring tricks

Published only a few months ago, Edwar El-Kharrat's collection of essays *Unshouda Lil-Katifa* (Hymn to density) constitutes the harvest of his long and prolific career as both a novelist and literary critic. In March El-Kharrat reaches his seventeenth birthday. It is fitting, then, that March is the month in which he will travel to the United Arab Emirates to receive the prestigious Uwais award, which carries a prize of \$100,000, in recognition of his contribution to Arab fiction. Fitting also that the announcement of the award should coincide with the publication of the present volume, essays which taken together outline El-Kharrat's credo as a writer.

In the title essay, "Hymn to density", El-Kharrat seeks to elucidate the requisites needed for the "density" of language he espouses in his writings, a density which should not constitute a barrier between the text and the reader. To him density necessarily calls for a wealth of narrative experience and is the result of the continuous balancing act between rules and freedom, order and spontaneity, the process of juggling that serves as a convenient metaphor for one of the main problematics of writing. In view of the sacrosanct status of the Arabic language, often viewed as an absolute, El-Kharrat considers that one of the major challenges faced by writers in Arabic is to treat the language as a relative entity, bringing to it the contemporaneous texture of a lived experience.

With reference to his own writing, El-Kharrat comments that while the language he employs draws on heritage, it is also enriched by his close contact with foreign languages such as English and French, and suffused with colloquial Arabic. Form and content are indissoluble. What he seeks to do in his work is to give voice to the silent, to objects and to dreams. Language to him, he concludes, is a musical structure — hence the passages in *Rama Wa Al-Tain* (Rama and the Dragon), for example, which rely primarily on alliteration and assonance. Working with the musical

texture of language he says, is an attempt to break into a geological layer where direct, primary communication is achieved through sound. He adds: "This requires from me a relentless and ardent search for the morphology of language and the sounding out of undefined areas — investigating them and discovering their possibilities."

Turning to his own, seemingly idiosyncratic conception of the novel, El-Kharrat states his rejection of the traditional conventions, including event, episode, psychological realism, plot or message — though he is careful to assert that fictional signification can resonate as loudly through the formal qualities of any given text.

Of the many issues and problematics that are tackled in this volume those questions revolving around cultural authenticity and national identity, to which El-Kharrat devotes an essay, are of great relevance to this on-going discourse. Here, El-Kharrat seeks to address the multiplicity of Arab-Islamic cultures. Cultural authenticity, as argued by El-Kharrat, becomes less a question of ethnicity or race than the accumulation and fusion of elements that go beyond the political and which can originate from a dizzying variety of far from mutually exclusive sources and which include the Pharaonic, Coptic, Hellenistic, Islamic, Arab and contemporary. Heritage, he posits, does not possess us, it is our possession. It is our duty to dust off the centuries deep crust that has formed on its surface by an ongoing process that involves the offering of fresh interpretations and explanations. As to national identity, it is neither pre-formulated nor incontestable. It, too, embraces variegated and dynamic components that are not, however, mutually exclusive.

In an essay entitled "To be an Arab", El-Kharrat lyricises about the literary and philosophical Arab influences he has imbibed. He has, he says, mixed with the poets of courtly love, has himself rhapsodised about beautiful virgins, has adored Laila unto mad-

ness, has known the civilisations of India, Persia and Byzantium, has spent five centuries in Andalusia. He is Arab in the same way as Avicenna, Averroes, Al-Hallaj, Ibn Arabi and Al-Nafri. However, he is not solely Arab, but is an Egyptian Arab — of those who built the pyramids, immortalised death, tutored Plato and brought light into the dark world. "I am the Egyptian Arab", he writes "who in seven millennia changed religion three times, though these religions remained in essence one, or very close. I changed my language three times, but it remained my own language, at once Egyptian and Arab." To be an Arab today, he elaborates, "is to work with all my brothers on this land, despite the trauma of birth and the ordeals of transformations and the return of the age of famines, fanaticism, oppression, the persecution of thought, the courts of the

inquisition, the dissolving of ideological opponents and religious and ethnic wars everywhere".

In another essay, El-Kharrat turns to the issue of normalisation with Israel. Although he is all for plurality and for difference of opinion, he finds normalisation or co-existence with Israel unfeasible given its sense of racial superiority and the oppression and breaching of basic human rights that result from the application of Zionist theory. Thus he asserts: "I contend that knowledge — knowledge of the self and of the enemy, of the self and of the other — leads to only one conclusion, namely the rejection of normalisation, through trips, communication, dealings and exchange."

There are many other topics El-Kharrat tackles in this volume with the clarity characteristic of manifestos: the issue of classical and colloquial Arabic in writing; the mythical element in contemporary art; experimentation and innovation; Coptic writers and Christian themes; the contemporary scene in fiction writing.

In the last pages of this volume, El-Kharrat turns to his native city, Alexandria, so oft eulogised in his work. It is a city that represents Egypt in all its cultural variety and complexity. El-Kharrat prefacing his comments on his Alexandria by a critical bibliography of previous writers in and of the city — the poets of the mouseion, the poets of cosmopolitan Alexandria and British novelists on the city, among others. Turning to his own Alexandria, El-Kharrat quotes reviewers and critics on his work and ends on a paean of names of Alexandrian places, figures and characters.

Reviewed by **Mahmoud El-Wardani**

Plain Talk

I have just received the 754 page *Proceedings of the Third International Symposium on Comparative Literature* which took place at Cairo University in December 1994. This gigantic work includes 52 papers which were delivered on the Symposium's theme of "History and Literature".

Comparative studies, I believe, should be the main pole around which higher research revolves. They are a means of bringing cultures closer to each other and of facilitating what one might call mutual discovery and recognition. I remember how, in England, back in the late 1940s, when I was responsible for Egyptian higher studies students, I proposed the subject of the portrayal of Cleopatra by English and Egyptian writers as a Ph.D topic. The thesis was quite a success and was later published in book form.

This is why I was delighted to find that one of the papers dealt with "The Serpent of Old Nile: Cleopatra and the English Actress". I may not agree with the term "serpent", but I certainly enjoyed the way the writer traced the interpretation of Cleopatra, first by dramatis like Shakespeare, Dryden and Ahmed Shawki, and then by actresses like Mary Ann Yates, Lily Langtry, Isabelle Glyn, Ellen Terry, Peggy Ashcroft and others. I remember watching Ashcroft play the role of the Egyptian queen with the Old Vic at Stratford. She managed, as the writer says, to bring the exotic queen closer to our immediate understanding, while ensuring her assumption of Eastern splendour and Eastern mystery are a part of her armoury of fascination."

The most innovative interpretation of Cleopatra by this generation, the writer suggests, was that of Vanessa Redgrave in Tony Richardson's 1973 Globe Bankside production "which moved the play further than ever before away from high tragedy and closer to political satire". Later on, however, in 1986 at the Haymarket Theatre, Redgrave "resorted to tradition, playing an imperious older woman who surprised audiences by her willingness to die for love."

I remember discussing the English theatre's interpretation of Cleopatra with Peter Brook when I met him during his visit to Egypt in the late 1970s. He had directed Glenda Jackson in 1978 at Stratford. Jackson's Cleopatra, according to Brook, was a true Egyptian and he tried to underline her "Egyptianess". By placing "Cleopatra firmly in an Egyptian tradition", writes Richards, "Jackson made her death more of a transfiguration than a tragedy."

Cleopatra — how she has resonated over the ages. Few are there among today's political leaders whom one can imagine having such longevity in the collective memories of so many cultures. Can one imagine future playwrights mythologising the lacklustre lot who strut across the international stage today?

I may have been carried away by this particular paper perhaps out of a real feeling of appreciation bordering on love for this great Egyptian queen. This has come at the expense of other papers by other participants in the conference, but I hope that I will deal with them in future issues.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Unshouda Lil-Katifa (Hymn to density), Edwar El-Kharrat, Cairo: Dar Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi, 1995



Those in need of medication before and after meals are not required to fast. Yet many will turn to alternative treatments which will allow them to fulfil their religious duty. In two consecutive articles Samia Abdennour warns against blindly following the path of alternative medicine while Fayza Hassan will speak to people who have benefited from "other ways" and to medical practitioners who recommend them

The seeds of discontent



Old remedies are back in fashion and many herbalists sell their own "secret" concoctions claiming to cure any and every ailment

"Alternative medicine" has caught on like wildfire in Egypt in various forms: from acupuncture to homeopathy, from treatment by the word of God to pseudo-scientific concoctions.

Herbs are the latest fad. Pharmacists and herbalists encourage their use, while TV programmes extolling their merits are broadcast several times a week. Herbs are described as God's gift to humanity, a panacea, whereas over-the-counter drugs are alleged to relieve patients temporarily and cause greater damage in the aftermath. Folklore, historical data and mythological accounts about herbs and their efficacy are adduced. The proponents of herbal remedies address people's emotions, emphasising the importance of preserving our traditions, culture and heritage. Ailing patients readily cling to any straw of hope that will relieve

the owner, who spent 25 years in Germany, decided to apply his belief in the curative powers of herbs. He bought a few hundred acres in a desert spot "to cultivate the land from scratch, allowing it to regain its fertility through correct methods of agriculture, but without the advantage of the silt of the Nile." No pesticides or insecticides are used, and weeds are plucked by hand. The crops are fertilised with specially treated manure from the cattle bred on the farm.

The herbs produced are packaged as easy-to-make infusions: peppermint, caraway, anise, cinnamon, fennel, etc. Vegetables like potatoes and peppers are sold locally or exported; other plants are packaged as remedies for diarrhoea, renal colic, cough and even as psychotropic medicines. Their composition as recorded on the packages comprises more or less the same in-

the time it is reaped, etc. For instance, the caraway and peppermint cultivated in the Behira district are different from those cultivated in Sharqya, Upper Egypt or other districts."

"Plants," clarifies Dr Yasirya Saad, professor of pharmacology at Ain Shams University, "did not acquire their chemicals to cure the diseases of the human race, but attained these attributes through evolution and natural selection, as a defence mechanism against predators. This is reflected in their bitter taste or sometimes even by a poisonous effect."

Almost all drugs derive from plants: aspirin from the willow tree, quinine and related antimalarial drugs from cinchona bark, many antibiotics from naturally occurring biological materials such as fungi, and drugs administered for the treatment of colic (anti-spasmodics) from Atropa belladonna, says Saad.

"In order to transform herbs into medicines, the very strict grinding machinery of science must be set in motion, where a team of pharmacists, pharmacologists, biochemists, physicists, botanists, etc., all work together to produce the drug."

Pharmacists study pharmacognosy: the knowledge of drugs, especially their origin, structure and chemical constitution. Their role is to analyse the product, refine it and present it to a team of scientists in its purest form for further studies. Pharmacologists study the science of the action of medicines, their nature, preparation, administration and effects, including materia medica and therapeutics.

The process of scientific experiments involves well-defined steps: isolating the active principle, studying its chemical and pharmacological properties, dosage, interaction of the product with food and other drugs, even attempting to prepare synthetic substances that resemble the product in its chemical structure, which would be both more effective and less toxic. The development of synthetic penicillin is a good example of this process. The drug is then tested on experimental animals, usually on three generations, to make sure it does not have a latent teratogenic effect.

This procedure was strictly enforced following the discovery of the injurious effects of some drugs, such as that of Thalidomide on foetuses. This grinding machinery takes a minimum of ten years of experiments and tests. Dr El-Khayal says that the cost of research is excessive: in 1990, research on one drug was estimated at \$15

billion.

The fact that a drug cures some patients does not suffice for it to be considered effective. Dr S H Sadek, professor of laboratory medicine, says that when a drug is given to a patient and he/she is cured after ten days, there are three logical propositions to be considered: either the patient was going to be cured in ten days without the drug, or the patient was going to be cured in seven days and the drug delayed the cure, or the patient responded to the drug and was cured after ten days. To resolve this ambiguous situation, persons responsible for scientific medical research have devised various techniques using "controls", "placebos", "blind" and "double blind" procedures. Conclusions are then deduced in accordance with the results obtained.

Claiming cures for herbal concoctions without knowing the exact composition and effectiveness of these concoctions is a luxury we cannot afford. In industrialised countries where herbs are used as curative medicine, patients are usually made aware of both sides of the coin: treatment through organic products and treatment by scientific medicine. They are exposed to literature dealing with both schools and are free to choose the school they prefer. In the Third World, however, where illiteracy is widespread, few doctors are willing to go through the extra work of explaining the options. Yet many consider it fully to treat a child suffering from pneumonia, conjunctivitis or renal stones, or an elderly person suffering from early colon cancer, amoebic dysentery or amoebic hepatitis, with guava leaves, nigella seeds, fenugreek or honey.

Liquorice, known for its healing effect on stomach ulcers, was discovered to have a sodium-retaining effect, producing increase in blood pressure and even sometimes dropsy or oedema. Royal jelly, also a natural product, and highly recommended by herbalists as a health tonic for many years, has been reported by WHO as "life threatening to patients with asthma and other allergic conditions".

Drugs produced abroad and approved by internationally acknowledged organisations are not made available to the local market before they are tested by Egyptian specialists. Yet locally produced preparations claiming to treat diarrhoea, cough, etc. are not exposed to this same routine. Dr Mo'nes claims that these packages are approved by the Ministry of Health as "food" products and not "drugs".

Certain illnesses have been completely eradicated from industrialised countries; life expectancy has increased, child mortality dropped, developments have been recorded in organ transplants and genetic engineering. Among the many factors contributing to the advances made in the field of science, homoeopathy has not been mentioned once.

Pot Pourri

The right to choose

A few years ago, visiting my sister-in-law in Montreal, I spent my first afternoon driving around town with her in search of a shop that was advertising salad bowls at a special price "for a limited time only". The fact that I had just arrived and would have appreciated a different kind of relaxation — like a nice cup of tea, for instance — after a long trip, did not seem to cross her mind. She assumed that, like her, I was an "ad addict" and couldn't wait to acquire a salad bowl for a dollar less than its usual price. I had often witnessed the kind of brain-washing which is the result of paying too much attention to TV commercials, but this was an altogether different phenomenon: my sister-in-law seemed driven by powers beyond her control. When we finally were able to locate the shop, we had wasted more than twice the saved dollar in petrol. Confronted with the coveted object, my sister-in-law gave it a cursory look, pushed it away and headed for the parking lot. It had obviously not lived up to her expectations. I thought that she would at least be apologetic, not at all. She wasn't even disappointed. "It happens all the time," she said. "But I couldn't bear the thought of missing out on a bargain." As my holiday proceeded I realised that I was expected to fall in with her routine. In the morning we would watch TV and scan the newspapers for special offers, then sail forth to scout out the neighbourhood's supermarkets. Some supermarkets did not advertise, relying instead on their regular customers. She did not want to miss out on those "specials" either. After a quick lunch downtown, we would head to the more out-of-the-way shopping centres. At the end of each day we'd return, exhausted yet triumphant, loaded down with tins of mushrooms, root beer, frozen raspberries and instant coffee. One day, while we were having a quick bite at a fast food restaurant, her eyes took on that feverish gleam that I had come to recognise as one of the first symptoms of an ad attack. She had glimpsed the TV screen conveniently placed above our heads. "Finish up, hurry," she urged excitedly. "They are having an hour-long special on breakfast cereals, any brand." I was puzzled. "None of you eats breakfast," I objected, gulping down the scalding coffee. "Who knows?" she said gaily. "We might want to take up the habit sometime."

An excellent cook, my sister-in-law only served her family fresh food, prepared when we came back from our forays into consumer land. That she never once used one of the coveted spoils from bloody battle did not seem to matter. Her pantry was one of the best stocked I have ever come across. The whole extended family could have sustained a six-month siege in style. Some people collect stamps; not my sister-in-law. Some people cannot keep away from the tennis courts; she couldn't resist a "bargain". Ad campaigns brought on all the signs of heroin withdrawal.

Recently, an advertisement promoting advertising has been running on one of the satellite TV channels with irritating regularity. I see it every time I sit it, remembering my summer in Montreal. "Advertising," whispers the actor in persistently dulcet tones: "The right to choose." Did my sister-in-law have the right to choose? The right to be infected, or possibly possessed, is more like it. How many more have been programmed in similar fashion, how many victims lie waiting by the highway of consumerism?

In Egypt, advertising displays a healthy lack of sophistication, and far less insidious powers of persuasion. We come to believe that we freely choose what we purchase. Most of my female acquaintances exhibit a solid scepticism when confronted with promotion campaigns: "If it needs advertising, then there is something wrong with it," says Mervat, a housewife, knowingly. "The cost of the advertisement is included in the price" adds Sawan, a physiotherapist.

As an "informed" shopper, I had always prided myself for never letting any commercial ploy influence my choice — until the other day. A friend called me to describe a new brand of yoghurt, made of skimmed milk but tasting luscious. "You would never know it has so few calories, it tastes so creamy. And guess what? It is 25 pence cheaper than any other brand." I travelled across town in heavy traffic to a certain supermarket, rumoured to be the only one where the yoghurt was to be found. Daringly, I double parked, risking a stiff fine. What matters? I was on a mission. "All these cars must belong to health-conscious customers who are here to buy the yoghurt. I must hurry," I told myself. A few hours later, I was home, clutching my prize: a bag containing several cartons of yoghurt as well as many other items I had not known I needed until I saw them. I tasted the supposedly calcium-laden delight. It was thin and watery, a little worse for consistency than my usual brand. Still, I finished it. It was somehow different from any other yoghurt I had ever encountered. Its mysterious flavour irritated the palate. And what was the risk of a fifty-pound fine when compared to the tidy Grail? I, after all, am not my sister-in-law.

The next day, I inquired about the yoghurt at my local supermarket. The attendant pointed to the dairy section. Dozens of cartons of the brand were staring down at me from their perch, slightly higher than eye level. Like most hurried shoppers, I tend to reach for what my eye spots first. Placing the items to be promoted in evidence, while slightly concealing others, is apparently a common trick in the business, and certainly does away with those expensive promotional campaigns. So much for the right to choose.

Fayza Hassan

Pharmacists are among the most vocal proponents within the medical profession. Yet an excerpt from the code of ethics of the American Pharmaceutical Association, applicable to the profession in all parts of the world, states: "The pharmacist refuses to diagnose or prescribe; he refers those needing such services to a properly licensed practitioner."

A limited number of physicians also see the benefits in occasional treatment by herbs. Dr Ali Mo'nes, professor of internal medicine at Ain Shams University, notes:

"Herbs and herbal treatment are the future of the world, just as they were part of the practice of the past, the practice of our forefathers." Dr Mo'nes condemns herbalists without any scientific background who prepare and prescribe concoctions, but hopes that more medical personnel will come to see the benefits of "natural medicine".

Dr Mo'nes has used a concoction of his own devising on ten patients, with great results — "six were completely cured". He alone knows the composition of this concoction, and prepares it for his patients only. He did not patent the concoction "due to the excessive red tape needed and the lack of time to follow up on the matter".

Dr Mo'nes cites three sources of his knowledge of herbs: Hogg Sourour, one of the most renowned herbalists in Egypt, the teachings of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and other medieval Arab physicians; the Faculty of Pharmacy at Cairo University.

A farm on the outskirts of Cairo is benefiting from the increasing popularity of herbal med-

icaments, but in different order and proportions. When asked by a professor of pharmacology on what basis the ingredients were combined, the owner simply answered: "Experience".

Dr Mahmoud El-Khayal, professor of pharmacology at Al-Azhar University, asserts: "We do not deny the efficacy of some herbs, but we do not know their active principle. To do so a thorough study must be made of their side-effects, toxicity, etc. The nigella seed (*habib al-baraka*), for example, has been studied in this respect. If such research does exist for other herbs, however, it has not been published and reviewed by other scientists."

El-Khayal warns against generalising the application and effect of such products in their natural form. "The properties of a plant in its natural form vary from one location to another, depending on its environment, the soil in which it is cultivated, the amount of sun and moisture it absorbs, the season in which it is cultivated,

and the process of scientific experiments involves well-defined steps: isolating the active principle, studying its chemical and pharmacological properties, dosage, interaction of the product with food and other drugs, even attempting to prepare synthetic substances that resemble the product in its chemical structure, which would be both more effective and less toxic. The development of synthetic penicillin is a good example of this process. The drug is then tested on experimental animals, usually on three generations, to make sure it does not have a latent teratogenic effect. This procedure was strictly enforced following the discovery of the injurious effects of some drugs, such as that of Thalidomide on foetuses. This grinding machinery takes a minimum of ten years of experiments and tests. Dr El-Khayal says that the cost of research is excessive: in 1990, research on one drug was estimated at \$15

Sufra Dayma

Baked mashed sweet potatoes

Ingredients:
2 kgs of sweet potatoes
3 eggs
1 cup of milk
5 tsp. of sugar
150 gms of butter
3 packets of vanilla

Method:
Soak the sweet potatoes in tap water for some time until the dirt loosens, then scrub each one with a utensils brush under running water until each one is thoroughly clean. Towel dry them and bake them in a pre-heated medium oven for at least one hour until the skin loosens and the sweet potatoes are tender. Leave to cool off, then peel and mash. Butter coat a baking bowl (size permitting the mash to be 2-3 inches high). In a cooking pan, melt the butter then add the mashed sweet potatoes, the milk and the sugar. Stir then add the beaten eggs with vanilla and keep stirring vigorously until all ingredients disappear. Pour into the baking bowl and bake in a medium oven until the top is golden. Serve hot (that's one taste) or serve at room temperature (and that's another taste).

The salad Nicoise arrived. Now dress it up how you will: tinned tuna is timed tuna and fish, any

Restaurant review

Middling and true

Nigel Ryan on the missing duck

Carroll restaurant on Qasr Al-Nil has its ups and downs. The first time I went there I ate the most delicious duck with olives, but that was five years ago and whenever I have been back duck, with or without olives, has been off the menu. On one particularly memorable occasion I went to lunch with a colleague at Carroll and the usual, sadly predictable scene began to play itself out. I glanced down the menu — more a matter of form, this, since I remain hopeful that some day, at some time in the future, I will ask for duck and duck there will be. But duck was off. My colleague asked for something, I forget what, but that too was off. I tried again. No luck. My colleague changed her order and again no luck. Finally, in exasperation, she asked what was available. Nothing was available, we were told, because there had been a large party the previous night and they had eaten all the food.

There was some time ago and to be fair to Carroll it only happened once. On other visits quite a lot

of coquille de poisson was a strange affair.

I find the interior of Carroll reassuring. I like white table cloths. And sometimes it is very pleasant to escape the midday glare and exchange it for the gloomy, wood panelled, dark brown panels of the interior of Carroll. The place looks, after all, like a proper restaurant. No tricks, no design, just a good, straightforward dining room. It is narrow, like a train carriage, with a bar at the end. It is, though, never more than half full, which means that you are not obliged to listen to the conversation of fellow diners. Nobody need park as close as the crowded tables might suggest.

I ordered duck. There was no duck. So I changed my order to coquille de poisson. My companion ordered a salad Nicoise, followed by steak au poivre.

The salad Nicoise arrived. Now dress it up how

you will: tinned tuna is timed tuna and fish, any

AI-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

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1952 as display

President Hosni Mubarak decreed the conversion of the Nile-side former headquarters of the 1952 Revolution Command Council into a museum, displaying documents, pictures and other mementos of an eventful era. Maurice Guindin recollects events he saw at first hand



(Clockwise from left) Gamal Abdel-Nasser addressing a rally; ex-Premier Ibrahim Hadi (foreground, wearing suit), leaving courtroom. Above the door "Revolution Tribunal" is inscribed on the white field of the nation's new red-white-black flag; the three members of the tribunal (left to right) Aswar El-Sadat, Abdel-Latif El-Baghdadi and Hassan Ibrahim. The trial was held in 1953; Salaf Naser, ex-director of General Intelligence (extreme left) facing court president Hussein El-Shafai during the 1968 trial

A small two-storey villa with a tower that looks like a minaret or a tiny lighthouse nestles between clusters of trees on the western bank of the main branch of the Nile in the heart of Cairo.

Before the 1952 Revolution the building was one of more than a dozen palaces and rest-houses of the fan-loving King Farouk.

After his overthrow by the army in July of that year, it became the headquarters of the 12-member Revolution Command Council (RCC). Hundreds of meetings of the council, headed first by Gen. Mohamed Naguib and later by Gamal Abdel-Nasser, were held in the building. Most of the gatherings would extend late into the night and members ate frugal meals during sessions, consisting mainly of *foul*, *taameya* and cheese sandwiches and yoghurt. Waiting reporters in the press room, including the writer, were served the same food.

Naguib was the nominal head of the RCC and became Egypt's first president. The RCC relieved him in late 1954 and Nasser took over. Most of the momentous decisions in the first few years of the revolution were debated, reached and announced in that building. They included the agrarian reform law of September 1952, limiting agricultural land ownership, the abolition of the monarchy the following year and the confiscation of the royal family's property.

The conference room at the building also witnessed a historic debate on what

to do with King Farouk after the army seized control of the nation on 23 July 1952. Most members favoured Farouk's overthrow and exile. The only dissenter was Wing Commander Gamal Salem, who was known for his hot-headedness. Farouk was forced to abdicate and leave the country on 26 July.

The RCC headquarters is equally remembered for the major trials in its large rectangular hall that was converted into a courtroom, complete with bench and railed dock, on the second floor.

The building was selected for the trials and, indeed, to serve as the RCC's headquarters because its location was ideal for tight security. With trees and spaces on either side, it could be cordoned off in seconds without causing inconvenience to anyone.

A series of trials were held for political leaders and senior officials of the defunct royal regime shortly after the revolution. The charges against them varied: subservience to the king and British occupation authorities, corruption, graft, abuse of authority and mismanagement.

The first to be tried was former prime minister, Ibrahim Hadi. In his case, there was the additional charge of having persecuted, imprisoned and tortured many members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The three-man tribunal officially named the Revolution Court, which heard his and subsequent cases, consisted of Wing Com-

mander Abdel-Latif El-Baghdadi as president, and Colonel (later president) Anwar El-Sadat and Squadron Leader Hassan Ibrahim as members.

Like all military legal proceedings, the trial was conducted with speed, dismissing most defence requests for postponement and refusing to allow lengthy defence presentations. A crisis arose in Abdel-Hadi's trial as his defence lawyer Mustafa Marei, one of Egypt's top lawyers, objected to the hasty procedures and withdrew from the case. Abdel-Hadi undertook his own de-

fense. Sure enough the Brotherhood plotted to assassinate Nasser in Alexandria in 1954. A member took several shots at Nasser as he addressed a rally, but missed. A severe clampdown on the Brotherhood followed, with thousands of its members arrested, six leaders executed and hundreds of activists imprisoned.

Nasser spent most of his time at the RCC building during the critical days of the Suez aggression against Egypt by British, French and Israeli forces in late October and early November of 1956.

He had a small bedroom next to his office and during British and French aerial attacks on Cairo and its outskirts he would venture onto the roof of the building, using binoculars to see what was going on.

In the mid-60s, there was another crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and more trials of its leaders were held. This time, the RCC put its firebrand, Wing Commander Gamal Salem, at the tribunal's head.

But the biggest of all the trials at the building came in 1968, with military and

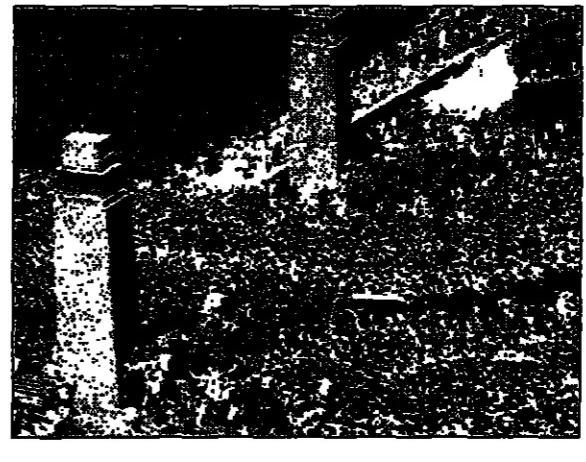
other leaders blamed for the 1967 defeat in the war with Israel and a subsequent plot to unseat Nasser, standing in the dock. Foremost among them were Shams Badran, former minister of war, and Salah Nasr, former director of general intelligence.

The sight of that array of once-glistening officials standing as defendants behind bars was hard to believe. The mere mention of some of their names when they were in power had been enough to give some people the jitters.

When Nasser died in September 1970, his official funeral procession, which brought an estimated two million people out onto the streets, started at the RCC building that he loved so much. This was the last major event the building saw before it slowly lapsed into inactivity. Sadat, who succeeded Nasser, had little use for it.

But the building will always be remembered as a landmark in modern Egyptian history. Mubarak's decision to turn it into a showcase for the nation's annals since 1952 puts the seal on the landmark.

When Nasser died in September 1970, his official funeral procession, which brought an estimated two million people out onto the streets, started at the RCC building that he loved so much



The inside story of the 1952 Revolution is to be documented by a newly-founded research unit at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, writes Dina Ezzat

Archaeology of revolution



Hoda Abdel-Nasser

The years that witnessed the 1952 anti-monarchy revolution and its aftermath, including the emergence of Gamal Abdel-Nasser as leader of the Arab world, is one of the most controversial and significant phases of Egypt's modern history. This period of political and social upheaval, economic confrontation and military battles, has been the subject of thousands of books, articles and research papers.

But the records of these tumultuous years remain incomplete, and many inside stories remain untold. With the aim of filling this gap, Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies is launching a documentation effort to be known as the Research Unit of the Egyptian Revolution. Hoda Abdel-Nasser, daughter of the late president, has been commissioned to head the new research unit.

"This unit has two parallel targets," explained Abdel-Nasser, a professor of political science at Cairo University. "One objective is to document and, if possible,

collect all sources of information, whether books, articles, dissertations, memoirs or official documents, that deal with, or shed new light on, the leaders of the 1952 Revolution."

"Another objective is to open the door for further political, sociological, military and historical research on that period and short and long-term consequences."

The first phase of work will be focused on the "Nasser years", beginning with 1952, when the revolution was launched under Nasser's leadership, but with Mohamed Naguib acting as a front man, and ending in 1970, the year of Nasser's death. In the intervening years, Nasser not only rose to be Egypt's president but was seen by many as a hero of the Arab world.

Hoda Abdel-Nasser is not underestimating the difficult task ahead. "We are talking about 18 long years," she said. "We will have to go through documents that are in the possession of various official and non-official sources both inside and out-

side Egypt."

Another job will be to interview large numbers of people who were directly or indirectly involved in decision-making and implementation during that period. "This is not going to be an easy job," she acknowledged, "because we are not just talking about ministers or top officials of that time but also about less prominent people who played a role in making things happen."

Locating and contacting these people will not be easy. Many will either be dead or well into their eighties. Some are likely to require a good deal of persuasion before agreeing to talk.

"It has been 25 years since Nasser died, and many of the issues or concerns that would have made people prefer silence are no longer valid," Abdel-Nasser said. "But people are still entitled to privacy and to protect their own interests. So we are going to negotiate with the sources, or their families, and agree on legal arrangements

under which they would be willing to provide an authenticated testimony."

The idea of establishing this research unit was first floated in the early 1970s, following Nasser's death, but it never materialised then. However, 20 years later, Hoda Abdel-Nasser is convinced that "with genuine interest and dedication, it is never too late".

The idea got the official seal of approval from Al-Ahram's management less than four weeks ago, and work is already well under way. The unit has already contacted some people, and they have agreed to contribute documents and provide testimony, Abdel-Nasser said.

The unit's staff are keen that information should eventually be computerised. "We are hoping to have good documented references on computer disks and that we will eventually be linked to the Internet, both to access and contribute information," said

Abdel-Nasser. This means, of course, that the project will require a high level of funding. Although Al-Ahram has allocated a respectable budget, efforts are being made to raise more money. Abdel-Nasser assured that "we have promised from some very serious people who are keen to contribute funds to make the unit function according to the highest standards."

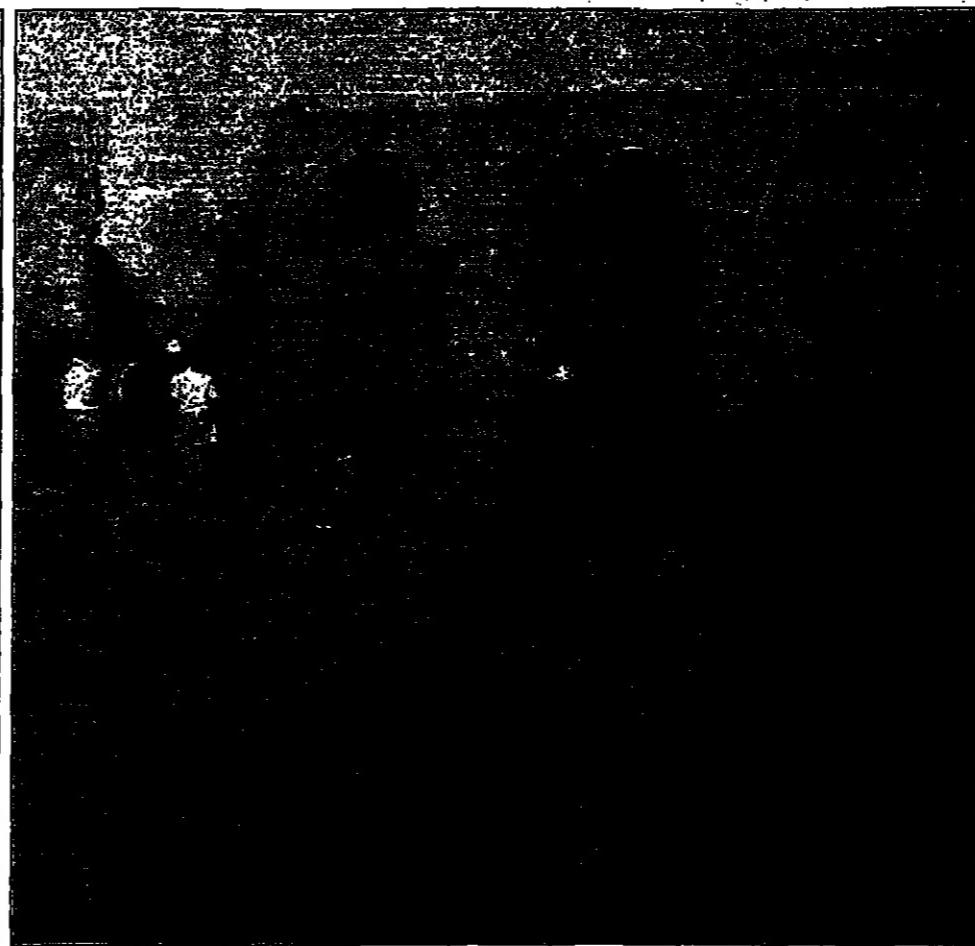
The new unit's staff of researchers will mainly be specialists in politics and history. But, "we are also going to benefit from the expertise of retired officials who served in important and influential posts at the time," Abdel-Nasser said.

While acknowledging that it would take some time to make the unit work, Abdel-Nasser was nevertheless hopeful that her aim — "to provide dedicated researchers with the information they need" — could be achieved in the not too distant future.

Edited by Fouad El-Gawhary



The Kiosk of Kertassi (left) and Ka'abat Ibrahim are two of the most lofty monuments on the shore of Lake Nasser



photos: Mohamed Wasim

SILENT IMAGES

Women in Pharaonic Egypt

H.E. Mrs. Suzanne Moustafa

ZAHRA HAWASS

Travellers' book guide

From royal
consorts
to working
women

Women feature strongly in representations of ancient Egypt, although usually confined to secondary roles. But beyond these pictorial depictions, little is known of their lives. In *Silent Images: Women in Pharaonic Egypt*, Zahi Hawass, director-general of Giza antiquities, gives a detailed insight into issues hitherto ignored, or only briefly alluded to, in earlier publications. Going beyond the formal descriptions of ancient Egyptian women as the "lady of the house" and "beloved of the king", the author has penetrated such issues as her role in society, her rights under the law, and the conditions under which working women carried out their duties.

Instead of concentrating on dress and adornment, and presenting the ancient Egyptian female as a vain creature seemingly preoccupied with wigs, makeup and jewellery, chapters have been devoted to love and marriage, motherhood, working women, and even such issues as inheritance, the attitude towards monogamy, adultery and divorce.

Silent Images first presents the historical setting and then moves on through chapters that describe the lives and expectations of ancient Egyptian women: queens — only four of whom ruled in their own right; royal consorts; princesses; and the wives of working men. Women's concerns such as pregnancy, childhood, infancy, and the role of the wet-nurse are covered, in addition to details on topics including funerary rites and entertainment.

Dancing was important in Egyptian culture, both for celebrations and for religious events", writes Hawass. "There are many depictions of girls performing the energetic *new* dance during funeral celebrations, clad in just a kilt and a long hat or pony tail with a disk at the end. A scene showing girls being trained to dance is found at Beni Hassan; the girls are shown practising various steps and movements, instructed by two men. Daughters of elite families would also be taught to sing and play a musical instrument, so that as adults they would be able to participate in an essential part of temple ritual."

Silent Images is a glossy publication, and Hawass' prose is so lucid and authoritative that the book is a joy to pick up and difficult to put down. The many well-placed illustrations complement the text, but perhaps the most intriguing picture is the cover photograph, which features the lower part of a woman's face with finely carved lips. Details of this masterpiece are lacking; in fact it is an uninscribed fragment often ascribed to Queen Tiye because of the distinctive lip carving; it may, alternatively, be one of the Amarna princesses.

Asked the reason for his choice of cover, Hawass responded: "There are many images of women depicted on the walls of tombs and temples, but no words are said by them. That is why I chose to feature lips, a most expressive feature of the anatomy, and why I called the book *Silent Images*".

This is the first book published by the Cultural Development Fund in English, and unfortunately publishing standards have failed to match the competence and accuracy of the author. There is an inconsistency in the quality of illustrations; some are indifferent, occasionally they are incorrect (pp 41, 113). Some would have been much improved by cropping (pp 10, 29, 50, 79), several no captions, and at least one is missing (p 169).

Perhaps more disturbing to the general reader is the fact that the captions for these illustrations clearly escaped editorial scrutiny. Some 45 per cent of the nearly 200 illustrations have one or more errors in their titles, including examples as ludicrous as "sacks containing... instead of 'sacks containing... and reading'" instead of "trading". Alerted to the propensity for mistakes, even punctuation errors begin to grate and the reader becomes conscious of repeated discrepancies between textual spelling of names and those that appear in the captions.

Hopefully when reprinted, as we are assured it will be, these shortcomings will be remedied. It is important they should be, because *Silent Images* covers important new ground. The lot of the womenfolk of the workers who built the Giza Pyramids, for example, is examined using fascinating unpublished material from Hawass' excavations at the workers' cemetery in Giza. *Silent Images* sheds light on issues never before raised, giving us our first glimpse of the reality of women's lives in ancient Egypt.

Reviewed by Jill Kamill

Wonders behind the dam

Lake Nasser, still one of Egypt's most pristine regions, is now a thriving tourist destination. Three ships cruise its waters and efforts are being made to protect the special attractions of the region. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** and **Nevine El-Aref** report

For many years there has been much speculation about developing the world's largest artificial lake into a destination for tourists, but the talk was followed by very little action — until last year.

An ambitious plan initially proposed by the Ministry of Tourism to operate a hovercraft on the lake never materialised and in late 1993 only one cruise ship was operating on Lake Nasser. Now, with three luxury liners cruising the tranquil lake, travel agents are busy promoting the salvaged Nubian temples and the surrounding natural desert environment where gazelle, wild cats, and birds abound. The concept of Nubia as *terra incognita* and a virgin Lake Nasser are taking a turn.

Lake Nasser was formed as a reservoir storing the backwaters of the High Dam, built between 1960 and 1971. The backwaters inundated large areas of Nubia, a desert region of about 22,000 square kilometres between Aswan and the Sudan, and extending into the Sudan.

A quarter century has already passed since temples in the area were saved from the lake waters following the construction of the High Dam. They include the relocated famous temples of Abu Simbel.

Travel agents say that as a result of publicity campaigns abroad, tourist inquiries are pouring in. Some agents are promoting Lake Nasser as an ideal destination for veterans of Nile cruises. "Having already experienced the Nile Valley they want to explore a new, unspoiled and historically important land," said Karim Garanah, president of Tarot Garanah Corporation, of his clients. His company established the first Nile cruises between Luxor and Aswan.

The first ship to cruise Lake Nasser was private investor Mustafa El-Guindy's "La Belle Epoque" which was initiated into the lake in December 1993. A successful tourist venture, two more vessels were launched on Lake Nasser in November of last year: "Tania" of the Travco

travel agency and "Nubian Sea", owned by the Garanah family.

According to Garanah, his 75-cabin "Nubian Sea", the largest in operation, is fully booked until April. He offers a one-week trip featuring on-shore entertainment such as traditional "Nubian Nights" of music and dance. In order to further promote the lake cruises, he has invited tour operators from Britain, Switzerland and Italy to sample his cruise.

"Our European clients have been asking about the potential of Lake Nasser as a tourist destination. We found that the salvaged temples of Nubia appealed to many of them," said Garanah, whose company brings in 23 per cent of French tourists to Egypt.

The Nubian monuments that flank the lake can be divided into four main groups, explained Abdin Siam, director general of Aswan and Nubian monuments.

First: The large Temple of Kalabsha, a small one known as Beit Al-Wali and the Kiosk of Kertassi. These have been reconstructed. Second: 150km to the south are three temples built by Ramses II: Al-Sebou, Dekka, and Al-Maharaqa. Third: Further south are the temples of Amada and Al-Der and the Tomb of Bennut. Finally, 280km south of Aswan are the great temples of Ramses II and his wife Neferari at Abu Simbel. Qasr Ibrahim, a frontier fortress lying just north of Abu Simbel, was only briefly on the tourist itinerary.

"Qasr Ibrahim houses dangerous reptiles and insects," explained Abdin Halim Noureddin, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). "It's risky to walk there." A British archaeological team will soon begin the restoration of the fortress, he said.

"Bats and insects had invaded many parts of the temples due to long neglect," said Noureddin, "but the temples have now been cleared of dust and sand." In addition, he said, a communication system has been established between Wadi Al-Sebou, Amada and the Aswan antiquities office, and the temple guards are now equipped with walkie-talkies. Connecting roads are also being built between the temples.

Most studies of the lake suggest developing the area's tourist potential. Areas like Wadi O'ar located five kilometres south of Abu Simbel and Dungul Oasis, 170km south of Aswan, were cited as "perfect places for recreational tourism" in a community development study conducted by the Ministry of Tourism. A study issued by the High Dam Development Body called for the rehabilitation of Nubian communities that were evacuated after the inundation.

But ecologists such as Egyptian geologist Rushdi Said, urge that the lake and

its embankments be protected as a nature reserve.

The construction of tourist sites and ports on the shores of this 500km-long lake is being controlled. The High Dam Authority has instituted

regulations to protect the area and control investment activity. The General Investments Authority — the only body that grants licenses for building ships south of the High Dam — has issued a number of regulations restricting and governing maritime activity.

No more than five ships can circulate the lake at one time. Moreover, strict regulations have been imposed to control waste matter from vessels, and only five-star boats will be granted licences to operate.

Many investors have urged that development along the lake shores be limited to the construction of ports for the vessels. They have also called for road links between the temples and their night-time illumination. But the ideas of establishing marinas, launching water sports activities, fishing contests and wind surfing competitions have been abandoned.

Both visitors and travel agents would like to see Nubia remain unspoiled.

"Business in the area thrives on the environment. We sell a clean atmosphere so it is in our interest to keep the lake clean and unpolluted, the way we first discovered it," said travel agent Zohair Garanah, who plans to form a society of friends of Nubia.

When asked what additional facilities might enhance the tourist's experience, Evona, a Swiss travel agent, said there were none. "The land should not be developed at all, it should be left unspoiled.

Everything necessary for the comfort of visitors should be provided on the boat. The land should not be violated with development schemes."

A British bird-watching enthusiast, Alan Thompson, voiced a similar sentiment: "If we start introducing modern facilities into Nubia, we would be doing great harm to the ecological balance of the area. The calibre of tourists that come here does not look for recreational tourism. They are interested in nature and history, and those are already here," he said. "The only thing that might be organized is a safari, without hunting, to enjoy bird-watching and the wild life."

"We don't want another 'touristy' site like the Costa Del Sol. We came here because it offered something new," insisted Sandra Barton, an English traveller who came along with her husband Eddie. The couple learned about the lake cruise through an English travel agent. They had travelled the Nile many times before and thought of making a trip to an "unsophisticated"



Tips and impressions

THE LAKE NASSER fleet offers three itineraries: three-day, four-day or seven-day cruises. They largely cater to foreigners, and Egyptian travellers discovered, to their astonishment, that they were being charged foreign tourist rates to enter the monuments.

"Nubian temples are rarely visited by Egyptians," said Abdin Halim Noureddin, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). "Tickets for Egyptians have not been issued so far." He assured that the situation would be remedied in the near future.

Roving the area, reporters found the weather marvelous at night. The sky was filled with stars, the lake water shimmered in the moonlight which bathed the desert. When the ship cruised the water, it produced a soothing sound. When the anchor was dropped, all was quiet. We saw a light appear above water level and thought that it was a group of buoys. Then, at closer view, we discerned the Nubian temples of Al-Sebou. Our ship cast its anchor a few metres away from the shore and a small motor boat transported us to land. Khaled El-Enany, a lecturer at the Faculty of Hotels and Tourism said the temple is one of the biggest built by Ramses II in Nubia and that its entrance is similar in shape to Karnak. "Both sides of the entrance are lined with sphinxes which are known as sebou (lions) to Egyptologists. The Al-Sebou Temple has 159 religious scenes showing Ramses II offering sacrifices to the deities," said Enany. "One unique representation shows Ramses II as king giving offerings to deities, of which he himself is one." The reliefs include a list of Ramses II's 170 daughters and 111 sons.

Lights are being installed at the Al-Sebou temple, and afterwards at Abu Simbel where a sound and light performance will eventually be presented, said Abdin Halim Noureddin. Meanwhile, every cruise offers its own sound and light show to its passengers.

Healing sands

The Weekly uncovers Aswan's budding reputation as a health spa

Aswan now has yet another attraction for visitors. Always appreciated for its sunny weather and healthy winter climate, the historic city is now developing as a destination for those seeking relief from rheumatic and arthritic pain and skin complaints. Safaga, on the Red Sea, is perhaps Egypt's best known health spa, but Aswan is now following a close second.

According to Maher Youssef of the National Research Centre (NRC), experiments in which more than 50 patients were exposed to the sun's rays and covered with 5cm of sand twice a day for two or three weeks, have shown a 90 per cent success rate.

The results were remarkable. The patients

who did best were those who were taking some kind of medication in addition to their sun and sand treatment. In these cases, remission lasted for an average of nine months before more treatment was necessary.

The idea of promoting health tourism in Aswan was first raised during the tourist recession, said Magdi Azab, deputy chairman of Isis Hotels. However, he continued, "Now that news of the cures is getting around, there is a flood of interest. Enquiries coming in from people in Egypt and abroad, and occupancy rates are going up."

Aswan has long been a favourite refuge of Europeans escaping the cold northern winter. Some visitors, like the late Aga Khan, came often. He was an annual visitor, and would

habitually bury himself neck deep in the hot sand overlooking his favourite part of the Nile. So content was he with Aswan, and the curative properties of its sand, that he asked to be buried there. His mausoleum is now one of the tourist sites of the town. His French widow comes to Aswan every winter, staying at the villa her husband built at the foot of the hill where the mausoleum stands.

Isis Island is currently the city's only health resort with a resident climatotherapist. But according to governor of Aswan Salah Mesbal, the city's potential as a health resort is being developed and more centres where sufferers can find relief are envisaged.

NE

Reviewed by Jill Kamill



From royal
consorts
to working
women



Egypt's Hadi Khashaba struggling for the ball in the second match against Cameroon

photo: Hosam Dib



M. Abdel-Gell of Egypt (L) in control of the ball

photo: Mohamed Nassef

Kroling under fire

Three goals and two weeks ago, the Egyptian national soccer team arrived in Johannesburg for the 20th Africa Cup of Nations (ACN) competition with stars in their eyes and a taste for gold. But what at first appeared to be a confident team is now one plagued by inconsistent performance and a good deal of criticism of team coach Ruud Krol.

In the first match Egypt played, they managed, primarily through sheer luck, to defeat newcomers to the ACN, Angola, 2-1. The second match, against traditional powerhouse, Cameroon, however, was played with skill. Egypt lost the game 1-2.

Despite the fact that the team played well against Cameroon, critics seized the opportunity to point the finger at Krol, arguing that his 4-4-2 game plan was incompatible with the formation with which the team was used to playing.

Seizing the opportunity to jump on the bandwagon, veteran players on the team confirmed this by saying that this formation was, indeed, not what they were used to. In the past, they argued, the emphasis had been on skill, not physical fitness.

If these comments were designed to faze Krol, then they were poorly worded. Stating that he did not need the players to explain his job to him, Krol refused to change his strategy just because the team wanted it so. To add insult to injury, Krol remained steadfast in his conviction of favouring the young players drafted from the Olympic team he used to coach.

To help diffuse the situation, the team's supervisor, Samir Zaher met with Krol in an attempt to reign him in and encourage him to strike a more amenable balance between veteran and novice players. Zaher, who is also the Egyptian Football Federation's deputy, warned Krol that action by the EIFF may be taken against him if veteran players lodge more complaints.

For Krol, there seemed to be no reprieve from the tongue lashing he was receiving from Zaher, who, on a roll, also blamed Krol for prematurely fielding injured players in the ACN. As a case in point, Zaher threw about Ahmed Hassan's name. Hassan was one of the Olympic team members who joined the national team at the ACN but has never played with them before.

On his part, Krol did little to direct attention from himself. He fielded Ali Maher, a former Olympic team member, and a player who has recently been plagued by deteriorating performance and an inability to concentrate on the

As the quarterfinals of the ACN draw near, competing teams battle it out for a slot while Egypt's national team coach, Ruud Krol, tackles some problems of his own. Osama Khalil reports from Johannesburg



game. "Maher is a skilled player with the ability to score at any point in the game," said Krol, defending his position.

This move did little in the way of appeasing Zaher. Krol, said Zaher, still believes he is coaching an Olympic team, not a national team. This is made clear in the way he selects new players and chooses a game plan that suits their needs versus incorporating the veteran players, added Zaher. The veterans, he stated, are simply ignored.

"These new players are still young and can be trained easily to play a more competitive game," refuted Krol. "This is all that I'm trying to do."

"What I can't understand is why Egypt is always looking for trouble," said a disgruntled Krol about Egyptian football policy. "The future of the game lies with the young players, not the old ones. It was the novices who won the gold in the All Africa Games."

Krol, who was appointed as national team coach just a few months ago, added, "I took over the team two months before the ACN began. There wasn't enough time to go scouring through the rosters of the different clubs, trying to collect a group of different players." But given the brief period of time, I'm trying to do

something constructive with this team, here in Johannesburg," he said. "And for the most part, I feel that I have succeeded." He attributes the loss to Cameroon as a product of poor refereeing versus player performance.

The 4-4-2 formation, stated Krol, is an up-to-date method used throughout the world. "The defensive mistakes were the players' faults, not the 4-4-2 system. The players themselves are at fault," he said.

On Krol's side is Supreme Council for Youth and Sports Head, Abdel-Moneim Emara. "Krol is right that the future of the game is with the new players," he said. "The national team is now undergoing a period of transition, and only four of the veteran players will remain on the team roster after the ACN. In light of these developments, the ACN should be viewed as a step to a new beginning." The average age of the new players is 22, explained Emara.

Moving from the temporal to the spiritual, another controversy broke out on whether the players should fast for the holy month of Ramadan. Krol, who had enough on his mind, opted to abstain from religious discussion, but his assistant, Farouq El-Sayed, in a burst of religious zeal, announced that he would resign if the

players are forced to break their fast. With the holy month beginning just two days before Egypt is set to meet South Africa, proponents of fasting maintain that the spiritual strength gained from the act of piety would compensate for the physical side effects. Others with more mundane concerns on their mind, like winning, argued that the team shoulders the responsibility to the nation. The veteran players, perhaps because they have been sidelined, decided to fast, irrespective of the consequences.

Along with getting involved in these debates, the team did find some time to play a match or two. Other teams, however, focused their attention on the games at hand. In Group D competition, Tunisia will lock horns with Côte d'Ivoire today while Ghana will attempt to maul Mozambique. With the absence of Nigeria from Group C, Gabon will sit by twiddling its thumbs while Liberia goes head-to-head against Zaire.

Host country South Africa has already secured a quarterfinal slot. To earn this privilege, the South Africa's Bafana Bafana dominated the "indomitable Lions" of Cameroon, 3-0 in the opening match. Their second victory came at the expense of Angola when Mark Williams punted the ball back in the face of the Angolan goalie in the 57th minute of the match. Angola may have played better, but South Africa was simply luckier.

Still tournament favourites, Ghana, may indeed crush Mozambique, but if they do, it will probably be with a minimum of effort as they save their strength for the quarterfinals. Four-time ACN champions, Ghana has already earned a slot after defeating, for the first time in the ACN, Côte d'Ivoire 2-0, and Tunisia, 2-1. Once bitten, twice shy, Tunisia and Côte d'Ivoire will meet on the field for the first time in ACN history. Tunisia, who are on the safe side, will go for an all-out victory, but their opponent will be content with a tie.

Gabon, in the biggest upset of the competition, so far, has also secured a spot in the quarterfinals after knocking the spots off of Zaïre's Leopards, 2-0. From their comfortable seats in the stands, the team will watch as Liberia and Zaïre kick about the ball. In this match-up Zaïre will not be content with anything less than a 2 point win, but Liberia only needs a tie or a win to allow George Weah's team their first ever taste of ACN quarterfinals action.

Additional reporting by Eric Asomugha

Soldiering on for the cup

Determined to retain the title they won in 1993, the Egyptian military soccer team have its sights set on the gold, reports Ahmed El-Said

The troops were out on the battlefield — or soccer field, as the case may be, for the qualifiers for the Military World Cup Soccer Championship which began last week. And while all the teams are aiming for the gold, for Egypt, the pressure is on to hold onto turf they had conquered in the 1993 Military Cup in Morocco.

Fielding a team of new recruits, the Egyptian team took a step in the right direction, defeating Morocco 1-0. But while this leaves them one victory away from the finals, for the team to defeat Algeria in the next match, they will have to strut their stuff with a little more skill.

In the match against Morocco, Egypt got off to a late start. With Morocco boasting a strong defensive formation, the Egyptian team couldn't penetrate the penalty box. To compound the matter, Egypt kept the pace of the match slow and even. Mohamed Abdel-Gell, the Zamalek team star, was not playing up to par. His passes lacked power and often were not completed. But his lack of stamina was inconsequential in comparison to a couple of blunders committed by Hisham El-Azouni and Tawfiq Sahr. Team coach Badawi Abdel-Fattah blew a gasket when these two key players missed two easy goals in the first ten minutes of the match.

The second half did not get off to a much better start. Unable to coordinate the defense with the offense, Egypt wasted too much energy on mid-field passes which failed to find their mark. It was only in the last five minutes of the match that Egypt managed to redeem itself when Ayman Mashali gave the twelve thousand, should-be-cheering fans a treat by converting a direct free kick into a goal.

With four minutes to go until the whistle, Morocco had little hope for a comeback. A long kick by Morocco's Ben Hartha had fans holding their breaths, only to exhale as the kick missed the goal by inches.

For Coach Abdel-Fattah, the team's sluggish start may have been a source of concern but, a victory is still a victory. The pressure, however, is on to keep the cup, won in 1993, in Egypt. This will be no easy feat and requires more planning and cooperation between team members. But, as an incentive, the Military Sports Federation has promised to fully fund the team if they qualify for the finals. This may be the extra ammunition the team needs to go the fast mile.

Racing body drags its heels

Although the Egyptian Automobile Club (EAC), since 1952, has been the sole body authorized by the Fédération Internationale d'Automobile (FIA) to organize car races in Egypt, the EAC, to put it mildly, has done little to promote or organise such races in this country.

According to members of the EAC, however, the club does throw good parties from time to time, where the members talk about the number of international licenses and permits given to cars entering this country. But, even as the night grows longer, they still dance around the issue of car races.

One reason for this obsequious manner is that car racing has never really been a sport that has garnered much enthusiasm among Egyptians. The only truly notable exception to this statement is the Pharaoh's Rally which attracts racers from around the world. The race, which is held every October, begins by the Giza Pyramids and winds its way through 4,000 km of desert. As the race gained fame, prestige and more spectators over the years, the number of participants, engineers, sponsors and journalists involved in the event jumped to 2,000. It was, in short, a good turn out, but it is negligible how much credit the EAC can take for this.

"Ever since the rally was first begun, it has been held under the auspices of the EAC," affirmed Magdi Kamal, head of the EAC's Sports Committee, adding that the organization is responsible for drawing up the rules and regulations of any race held in Egypt that must comply with FIA standards. The EAC is also responsible for organizing the race, providing safety precautions along the route, forming a judging committee, issuing racing licenses, forming an arbitration committee and allowing the race cars to enter the country. This is a handful, by any standards, and judging from the success of the Pharaoh's Rally, it would appear that the

With the popularity of auto racing growing yearly, the EAC is getting into gear and taking charge of racing in Egypt, writes Eman Abdel-Moezi

This, however, is a little off the mark.

The FIA representatives who supervised the rally found no fault with it not because of the EAC's careful preparations, but because the French organizer was an expert on desert rallies and made sure that the Pharaoh's Rally complied with all the FIA's rules and regulations.

Had the race required a circuit, the EAC would have been responsible for providing one. In this regard, the EAC got off easy, that time. But, given an increase in the number of race car drivers and the growing popularity of the sport, new races like the speed races and the auto cross were introduced. These kinds of competitions are held at least three times a year and are broadcast on television, thereby creating more publicity for the sport, attracting more fans and drivers.

But with these new races came a problem. The speed races were not held under the auspices of the EAC, which means that they did not necessarily comply with FIA rules. The circuit used was not built by the EAC, and when coupled with a couple of minor injuries, serious safety questions arose. Other quandaries included the fact that racers with a grievance could not find an EAC arbitration committee to mediate and ordinary driver's licences were required. In a sport which depends on finely honed driving skills, this was a recipe for disaster.

Seeking the EAC's recognition as a step to turn these local races into international

ones, the organizers adapted their rules to conform with those of the FIA. Officials at the EAC, however, initially turned down the request. Intervention by the FIA was enlisted by the organizers, and the EAC was forced to grudgingly change its position.

"We don't want to upset anyone, but in order to recognize this race, the organizers will have to modify their rules if they want it to be considered an auto cross race," said Kamal. "On the other hand, by the end of 1996, we hope to find for them a permanent circuit which is safe."

Until the discrepancy is resolved, many local racers, like Nader El-Khailat, have chosen to compete abroad. El-Khailat has been racing in Jordan and Lebanon for two years in mountain slalom and speed races. "Having a national governing body to supervise auto racing is important," he said. "It's presence and involvement makes racing easier and safer while its absence could be devastating for the competitors and the organizers."

Like other drivers, El-Khailat hopes that the EAC will hold meetings more often where all those interested in organising or competing in an event can meet and exchange ideas.

The EAC's Kamal is already one step ahead, however. "Along with the circuits, this issue is on our 1996 agenda," said Kamal. But the EAC seems to be unable to take the initiative without a push from the FIA. In an effort to promote the sport in Egypt, last October, the EAC's head, No man El-Alali met with the FIA's Middle East representative whereby both parties agreed to organise an Arab Rally that runs through Arab countries east of the Mediterranean and into North Africa. The fact the EAC has agreed, is, in itself, a step in the right direction.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

Lisez donc

En vente tous les mercredis

Élections palestiniennes

Le test de la démocratie

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chef de la diplomatie française

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Ahmed Belal

Le symbole de la réussite du hand égyptien

Au menu du Ramadan

Les bonnes résolutions

Rédacteur en Chef Exécutif

Mohamed Salmawy

Salah Taher: Epicurean strokes

At 85, he remains singular in his devotion to his art, and in the sheer abundance of his work

A bohemian reluctance to define himself, and the yearning for complete self-discipline: these are the seemingly paradoxical driving forces which have kept him at the easel for 60 years. He went from academic realism to abstract expressionism in one leap. In the mid-1950s journalists began to refer to him as a major artist, who had mastered the techniques of both schools. In the concept of the abstract, in striving towards the ultimate — what he calls the universal language — he has, perhaps, come a little closer to finding himself.

In Saudi Arabia, he held an exhibition based on the word *hawa* — "He" — multiple renditions of a single concept. Some considered that he had renounced the open-mindedness for which he was known and had succumbed to an all too popular mode. But for Taher, "*Ha*" is the ultimate abstraction, one which defies definition: religion as an experience of the soul, going beyond the intellect.

He has never cared for critics' opinions anyway, nor for those of an artistic milieu which mainly takes note of the prolific character of his production. He himself stands apart from the artists' milieu; you will not glimpse him at their traditional watering-holes. And he will not apologise for the fact that his work does not draw exclusively on the "ethnic vocabulary" to which so many painters resort in the conviction that it will lend their work a poignantly Third World quality. If his paintings strive for anything, it is the universal.

He combined a life of civil service with art, taught at the School of Fine Arts in the thirties, and directed the Luxor atelier in Gurna. He was the director of the Ministry of Culture's office for art when the cultural boom was just beginning, in the early '60s. He was director of the Museum of Modern Art and the khedivial opera house in 1962. The latter post, in particular, was one of his favourites. Later, in 1984, he headed the Society of Lovers of Fine Art.

He believes in a unity of the visual arts, literature, music, and

does not hesitate to pepper his conversation with chunks of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Those who dislike off-the-top-of-your-head discussions of culture and aesthetics will not find him endearing. But probe, just a bit, scrape away the seriousness, and his almost child-like sense of wonder appears, his laughter at a joke. He has been called a bourgeois artist, has been accused of painting with his tie on. He might well be bourgeois: he does enjoy life in an Epicurean sort of way. But he leaves the petty calculations — settling the price of a painting, say — to the middlemen who surround him.

He has no doubts about his own talent. The media latched on to him early enough, and he has also built up a solid core of clients who believe that buying his paintings is a good investment. He is perhaps best known for the innumerable portraits he has painted, attempting to capture the spirit which lingers after the features have changed. He has painted presidents and kings. His portraits have become a token of prestige in the homes of the affluent and those who aspire to refinement.

meetings fired his imagination: he became convinced that he would one day be an artist. He graduated from the Royal High School of Fine Arts in 1934. His masters were pioneers: Ahmed Sabri, Mohamed Hassan, Raghib Ayyad and Mahmoud Mukhtar.

It was from such mentors that he learned the techniques of academic realism. Ten years after graduation, gazing upon the series of nature scenes and portraits he had produced, he wished he could forget all he had learned. He became fascinated with abstract expressionism after an extended tour of Europe and America, and his passion for this school continued long after it was no longer fashionable. He has painted with what borders on fervour and has never stopped exhibiting his work since 1934. He obtained the Guggenheim award in 1959, and first prize at the Alexandria Biennale in 1961.

According to prominent art critic Makram Henein, "Taher's most important contribution has been his merging of figurative and abstract expressionism. His lines transcend the definite, are a mystic sublimation of the things we recognise around us. In his work

thirties, he has always been conscious of his physical state. He will fight decline all the way, with yoga and pilates to become a vegetarian. He is 85 but you do not feel it. He despises morbidity: sickbeds and visits to hospitals are out.

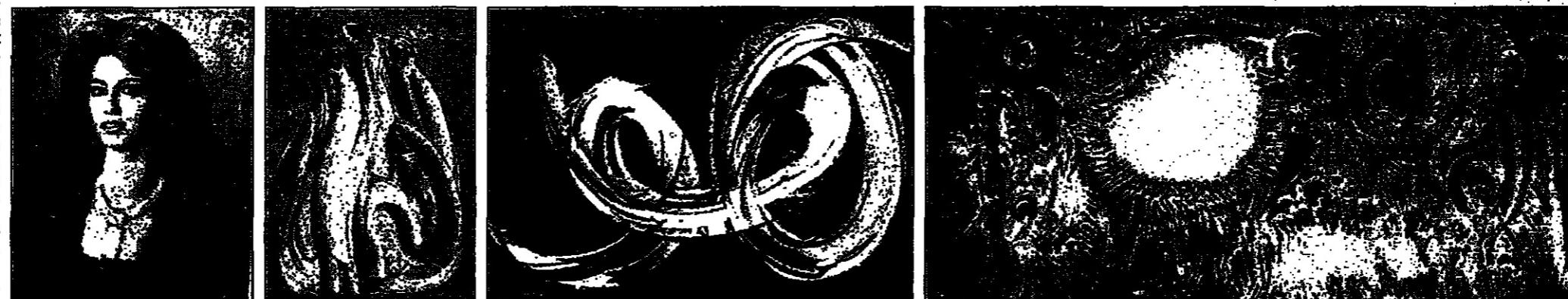
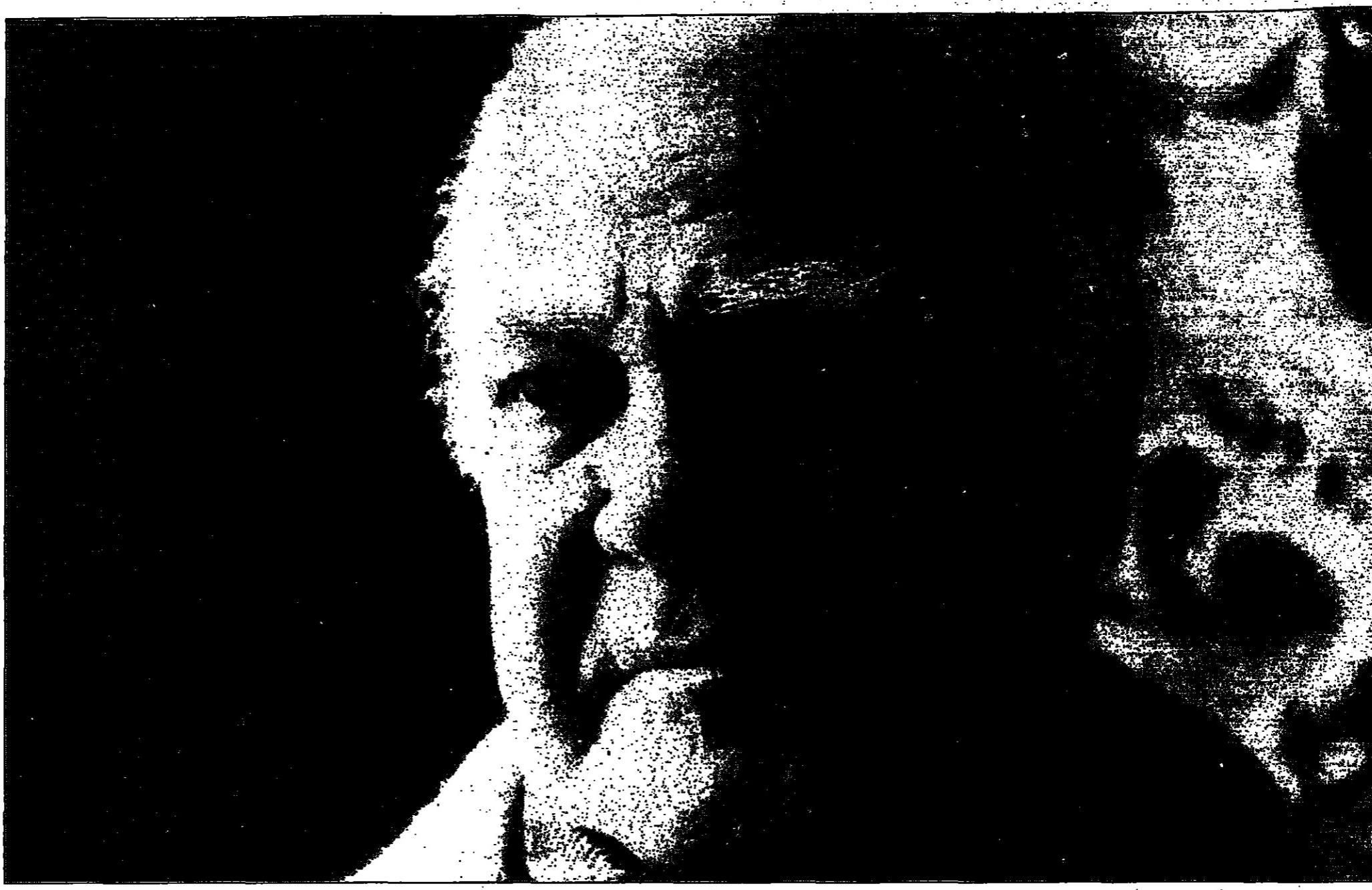
Still, he knows he is part of a vanishing race, a generation now almost extinct. He knew Tawfiq El-Nakib, and he may be the only one left among those who once frequented Abbas El-Aqqad's literary salon. Perhaps by force of habit, he still holds literary gatherings in his house. Yet he is keenly aware of the fact that they are, at best, simulations, faded reminders of better and more brilliant times.

His spacious apartment once housed more than 45,000 books. Around a third were lent — to friends, visitors, absent-minded acquaintances — and never returned. The room where he used to paint is now so cluttered he can hardly open the door. He now paints in his studio in Zamalek. One of his two grandsons lives with him. A few years ago his wife Aida died. He was the centre of her world; her calm, almost placid, nature lent equilibrium to his life. She shared even his artistic aptitude, for she liked to sculpt.

They brought up their son Ayman in an environment similar to that of Taher's childhood: freedom to reflect and to speak on any subject you would care to name. He never asked his son to study art, but Ayman chose to do so, and acquired Taher's athletic disposition to boot.

Taher is now contemplating ways in which to avoid the trivialities of life, and make more time for himself. The multitude of commitments which once seemed so important appear to have lost their significance. He will not countenance age or its limitations, either. He aspires, as always, to freedom and rigour.

Profile by Aziza Sami



Sixty years at the easel: the much sought after portraitist; the half-hearted dabbler in local flavour; rendering homage to the ultimate abstraction, *hawa*, "He"; the explorer of marine and volcanic formations

Taher's family was Syrian. He was born in Abbasiya on 12 May, 1911. His father was a merchant, and an avid reader. He grew up in an atmosphere free of complexes and prohibitions, an environment where what children could and could not do was less clear than is perhaps the norm. His father would take him along on his visits to a bookshop where writers and intellectuals gathered regularly. The

there is always the suggestion of domes, and the rippling waves of a river." Taher does not believe in intellectual interpretations of his works, though. He says you must feel them, as you would music, not think about them.

His good looks have always been slightly offset by a tendency to be overweight. It bothers him. Egypt's boxing champion in the

commitments which once seemed so important appear to have lost their significance. He will not countenance age or its limitations, either. He aspires, as always, to freedom and rigour.

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